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**You can't keep a good man dead**

# **KILL ONE, KILL TWO**



**ROBERT H. KELSTON**  
Complete Novel

# **KILL ONE, KILL TWO**

by  
ROBERT H. KELSTON

## CHAPTER 1

THE MCCOY, the redheaded one, whose friends called him Mickey but whose real name was Allen, finally maneuvered Emily into her room and eased her down onto the couch. She tried to drag him down with her. She was off on a crying jag and kept calling him “lover” and begging him not to leave her, but he wasn’t her lover and he knew he had to get out of there. So he stroked her smooth blonde hair with one hand and with the other pushed against the back of the couch until he was standing straight again.

For an instant, she held on to him and he could feel her fingers digging into his muscles, but then she sank back to the couch sobbing. In the gloom, Allen could see her white legs and her exposed thighs and he could see the gleam of her shoulders where her blouse had slipped down.

“Don’t leave me, Allen,” she begged. “Raul left me this morning and nobody has seen him since. Now you’re going to disappear too. I’m afraid to be alone.”

“Raul will come back,” he promised as though she were a baby and had to be soothed. “And you know I have to go. I’ve got a long drive ahead of me.”

“They killed Raul,” she sobbed, unable to understand him through her tequila haze. “They’ll kill you too. Don’t leave me, Allen. Take me with you.”

She reached for him again and he almost felt her fear, but then he remembered the load she had taken on and he shrugged and decided there wasn’t anything more he could do for her. She’d have to roll with the Mexican tequila until it left her.

From outside came the sounds of the street musicians; they were playing *Guadalajara* and they were playing it badly. Allen straightened his clothes, went to the door and leaned into the cool air of the Monterrey night, while he listened. Emily’s sobs still reached him as though she were mourning for her lover, and her crying was mixed up with the bad music and the smell of tequila and the cool, scented night air. Christ, he thought, it was just like a cheap photograph of a Mexican street scene. And this was the real thing.

Allen walked across the narrow sidewalk and slipped behind the wheel of his Jaguar. The musicians started to form a circle around him, but he waved them away and for just an instant longer he sat still, listening, breathing,

feeling the soft Mexican scene; it was half-sad and half-funny, like everything else in Mexico.

He started the motor and cut away from the curb, holding the speed down until he was sure the few drinks he himself had taken would not affect his driving. A sudden picture of Emily without clothes beat against him, almost making him want to go back to her, but he fought it away and turned the car into the wide highway that ran along the river.

The Rio Santa was dry this time of year and a few people were walking along its dried caked bottom. Allen could see the flash of a match when somebody lit a cigarette. Here and there somebody picked his way with a flashlight and the light showed stray goats and burros that fed on the sparse grass. Allen was almost sorry to leave.

Across the river, he could see the big mass of Saddle Mountain and he could almost see the gleam of the great dam he had built. Little trickles of water were already backing up behind the concrete wall and soon the trickles would become the lake they had named after him. McCoy Lake. It sounded real fine to Allen. In one of his pockets he could feel the gleaming gold medal they had given him, and in another lay the bulky Guadalajara contract to build an even bigger dam. It was a good way to leave Monterrey; it was a good way to leave any town.

By now the car's speed had crept up until the needle showed sixty and then sixty-five, and that was the way he was rolling when he saw the man come stumbling over the river bank right into the path of his car.

Allen hit the brakes and the horn and cut away from the bank, but it was too late. He felt the body hit the fender and jam it into his front wheel, and then the body bounced past his windshield post, hit that, and slipped past his door and over the river bank again. The car skidded out of control. For a minute Allen thought the front tire had blown, but then he forced the car back under control again and stopped.

He got out and leaned against the car, shaking and sweating like a man with jungle fever. The tequila haze was all gone now, and he was Allen McCoy again and he had just killed a man. A crazy, half-drunk, speeding American had killed a Mexican pedestrian and right now he had as much chance of getting to Guadalajara as the man he'd killed. From somewhere deep inside him Emily's warning came to him, clawing its way into his consciousness.

It was real quiet now, the phony kind of quiet where he could feel people

watching him all around even though he couldn't see anyone. Allen walked back to where the man had first appeared stumbling and lurching up over the bank. There was nothing to see there now—just some rocks and a few dying bushes. The body could have rolled all the way down the bank again, the way he had hit it. It might lie there all night before it was found. Allen went back to his car.

If he pulled the fender away from the wheel, he could drive again, and if he could drive he could go to the cops and report the accident and try to cover up his own negligence. Or he could take a chance and let the Jaguar roll and be far away from Monterrey before they even found the body. Allen took a deep breath when that thought hit him. An unidentified, drunken Mexican, killed by a car in Monterrey, was nothing unusual; nobody would break any speed records trying to find the man who'd hit him. And he could have his fender fixed anywhere along the road.

Allen realized suddenly that his headlights were still burning. Stalled cars with burning headlights attracted attention on the highway; he reached over and flicked them off.

Now it was really dark and it was deathly quiet. If that poor guy down on the bank were still alive and needed medical attention—Allen shivered. Hitting that guy had been murder to start with, but leaving him there, broken and bloody and unattended, was something else again, something even worse. Slowly, Allen walked around the car to the crumpled fender. He stood still, thinking, staring down at it. What the hell kind of a guy was he, anyway?

“Something happen, mister?” a soft voice slurred Spanish at him out of the night.

The sweat poured out on Allen's face again and he stiffened beside the fender. Just one quiet voice in the night asking one polite question and he knew he was in trouble. Deep in real trouble.

“You hit stone, maybe,” the soft voice offered helpfully. “All the time, they leave stones on the road. It is very dangerous.”

“I hit something, all right,” he answered in Spanish, trying to keep his voice steady, fighting not to give his fear away.

“Big stone,” the voice said. It was closer now and Allen could see the shadow of the man approaching. “I hear it rolling down the bank so I come to help. You American tourist?”

The Mexican was standing next to Allen now. They both stared down at the almost invisible fender.

“It is bad,” the Mexican said. “We pull away from wheel maybe, then it is all right again.”

Allen weighed his chances of getting away with it; they didn’t seem too good but it was something to try. Together they bent and heaved and Allen suddenly let go and straightened out again, his breath catching in his throat, fighting to keep from getting sick. His hands had come away sticky and wet, and the heavy wetness dripped slowly down his fingers.

“You broke something,” the voice said then. “Maybe much oil leaks.”

And Allen realized that this guy knew. He was trying too hard to explain everything. They were careful not to wipe their hands on their clothes or on the car.

“We try once more,” the Mexican said.

They tried again, Allen fighting his squeamishness, and this time the fender pulled clear. Then they squatted in the dust and carefully wiped their hands on the dry sharp grasses that grew on the river bank. After that they pushed the Jaguar over to the side of the road. The Mexican stretched himself on the bank to rest.

“You hit big stone,” he said again.

“You were a great help,” Allen said then.

“Is nothing,” the Mexican answered.

Allen offered the man an American cigarette, took one himself, and forced himself to light them. Neither one looked at the other in the light and neither man looked down at his hands.

“I owe you much,” Allen said.

“As you wish,” the Mexican said politely as though it didn’t matter.

How much? Allen wondered. Too little and the guy would go screaming for the cops. Too much and the guy would become greedy.

“I have no small bills,” Allen started out, feeling his way. He fished in his wallet. “Only this.” It was a five-hundred peso note—forty dollars. The man took it carelessly as though money didn’t matter, but he puffed up his cigarette until its glow showed him the five and the two zeros. His eyes widened and then he carelessly stuffed the bill into his pocket.

“You are kind, *señor*, ” he said. “The rock wasn’t that big.”

Only a little rock, a bleeding, mashed rock.

“Without your help, I couldn’t leave,” Allen pointed out, hoping the man would get the double meaning.

“Is done, is finished,” the Mexican said. He swung over the bank and

Allen heard him sliding down, avoiding rocks, swearing when he stubbed his toe. Allen was alone again. He shone his spotlight down the bank, searching for the body. There was nothing there to see, nothing but rocks and bushes and a grunting burro.

He got behind the wheel again and drove slowly away. He could almost feel the pain of the broken body on the river bank. He didn't feel good anymore. It was a hell of a way to leave Monterrey. It was a hell of a way to leave any town.

Emily had warned him, he thought superstitiously. He should have listened to her. He should have stayed with her warm, lovely body.

Behind him, a red spotlight suddenly burned out of the night and the wail of a siren caught the Jaguar and held it. Allen braked at once, scared again. He sat still, shaking. He'd been in Mexico too long to ignore a speeding, shrieking police car. When they sped with siren and spotlight on, it was because somebody had made them, somebody big enough to make them hurry; the cops never hurried for a peon.

First the stumbling body over the river bank, and then the helpful soft-spoken Mexican, and now a shrieking police car. There wasn't any running any more.

The police car passed the spot where he'd hit the man and came on without slowing down. Those cops even knew what they were looking for, he thought. And they picked him up in their red spot, picked him up a mile from the scene of the accident, with a fender that had been pulled away from his wheel. They had all the evidence of hit and run they needed and Allen knew now that it wasn't just coincidence. He was trapped the way Mexican cops like to trap anyone they go after, he was trapped without a way out.

He sat still and waited.

They pulled up beside him, shut their red spotlight off and then threw the lights from their big hand lamps over his car. They knew what they were after and they found it. They bent over his fender and played their lights around his front wheel. Allen could almost see what they were seeing. A shudder ran over his body.

One of the cops, the insignia of a sergeant barely visible in the dim light, came over to him.

"Back there," the sergeant said in Spanish, "you hit a man and you didn't stop to see how badly you hurt him."

"A man?" Allen asked as though stunned. He might as well try to play the

game out. "I thought it was a rock."

"A rock." The big cop played his light over the car. "You pulled that fender off that wheel and thought it was a rock you hit?"

"I thought oil was leaking," Allen said slowly.

"Oil."

The sergeant shone his light on Allen's hands. Those hands were stained the way no oil could have stained them.

"Oil," the sergeant said again.

He motioned to another one of the cops to come over.

"You come with us," he told Allen. "This one will drive your car."

"Nobody drives this car but me," Allen answered. "In Mexico a man's car is like his house. You stay out of this auto."

The big sergeant considered him for an instant.

"You just killed a man, maybe," he said then. "You had better come with us."

Allen hung back. The last thing in the world he wanted was to get into that police car full of American-hating cops.

"Maybe the man you killed has a brother," the police sergeant said then. "Maybe the brother is waiting for you. Maybe you are thinking of trying to run away from us again. It is better that you come with us."

As though the sergeant had just signalled, the other cop reached slowly down to his holster. Just as slowly, Allen tensed and then got out of the Jaguar. He watched the cop's hands moving slowly to the holster and he tightened like a spring being drawn taut. The cop saw him and hesitated.

"Don't pull that gun," Allen warned quietly.

"Don't pull that gun," the sergeant echoed. "The American will come with us."

Allen followed the sergeant, the skin on his back prickling and crawling. He got into the rear seat of the police car and four cops piled in with him, two in front, two in the back. A fifth one drove the Jag. Allen sat between the sergeant and the trigger-itching cop.

"American tourists come to Mexico and they think they own us," the cop complained. "The life of one Mexican is worth nothing to them."

"Save that talk for the cantina," the sergeant said.

"It could have been my own brother," the cop went on. "He walks here every night."

"But it wasn't," the sergeant pointed out.



The cop lashed out, his fist catching Allen unawares full in the face. Allen rolled with the punch and came back fighting but the sergeant pinned him. The fist of the cop came at him again and Allen felt the flow of blood gush from his nose.

“Don’t do that anymore,” the sergeant said calmly. The other cop settled back in the seat.

“And you, American, don’t try to resist arrest no more,” the sergeant said.

Allen didn’t answer. He had had at least that much coming to him. He wondered what else they had in mind.

They were quiet until the car turned into the police administration courtyard.

In the light of the big room they didn’t seem so big. Not one of them was as tall as Allen, and they were fat and sweaty and their sweat oozed out of their unpressed uniforms. They would take bribes and graft without a second thought, he knew, but he also knew that although they looked like toy cops, they didn’t shoot like toy cops. They could shoot like FBI experts. There wasn’t one of them that couldn’t hit anything he aimed at ten shots out of ten.

He sat and waited for what came next.

They ignored him.

A man stumbling on the road, that was an accident, he thought. And another man lounging by a river bank, willing to pick up forty American dollars, that too could be an accident. But a fast phone call and an alert bunch of cops who knew what they searched for, that was no accident. That didn’t just happen, and what was coming now wouldn’t just happen either.

After a while, a police officer came in. This one was clean and his immaculate captain’s uniform fitted him perfectly and he was freshly shaved. There shouldn’t be any officer on duty this time of night. They must have dragged the captain away from home in a hurry and they weren’t doing that for any peon; the guy he hit must have been a wheel.

“I am Captain Raymundo Elizondo Garcia, at your service,” the captain said bowing.

“At whose service?” Allen asked. “Why are you keeping me here?”

“At your service,” the captain said again. “Perhaps you would like to wash your hands.”

Allen looked down suddenly and almost became sick again. Red. Blood-red. He walked stiffly to the washroom while the captain waited. Then he walked stiffly back to the captain’s desk and sat again. The captain was

smoking and while he smoked, he studied Allen carefully.

“What happened?” he asked finally.

“I hit a man with my car and thought it was a rock,” Allen said for the last time. He swore to himself he would never use that line again. Murder was murder, even if it was manslaughter.

“A man helped me straighten out my fender,” he volunteered when he couldn’t stand the captain’s silence any longer.

“A man? What man?”

“How would I know?” Allen asked. “He didn’t introduce himself.”

The captain continued studying Allen. Finally he made his mind up.

“*Señor*,” he said standing and leaning over Allen. “We have found your rock. It is smashed and bleeding and it is quite dead. For hitting rocks like that a man must be driving fast. Speeding. And drinking maybe, too, yes? We call hitting rocks like that manslaughter.”

The captain’s voice was quiet but Allen could see the hate in his eyes.

“Whom did I kill?” asked Allen more quietly.

“We don’t know yet. Some Mexican. To you, just another dirty Mexican, with a dirty pair of pants and a dirty shirt and a dirty pair of huaraches, which are shoes to you, *señor*, and a dirty straw hat and nothing more. Not a wallet, not a centavo, not a name even. But he’s dead, *señor*, and the law calls that manslaughter.”

Allen leaned back slowly in his chair. Whoever had called the cops had known whom to call. This one was an American-hating Mexican, an educated one, who knew all the ropes.

“Look, captain,” Allen said then. “I’m sorry about what I did, but it’s too late to be sorry. As far as the damages are concerned, I’m insured.”

“Insured?” the captain cut him off. His hate almost leaped out of his eyes at Allen. “Insured against accident maybe, but not against murder.”

Murder, thought Allen. From accident to manslaughter to murder.

“All right,” he yelled suddenly, his anger rising and choking him. The others turned to watch. “I’m a goddam killer like you said, but I’m getting out of here. Get me the American consul.”

The captain was unruffled.

“He won’t come, *señor*.”

Allen reached for the phone on the desk and jerked it away from under the captain’s nose. The captain stiffened but didn’t do anything. A faint line of sweat on his lip showed the tension he was under and the control he was

exercising. Allen was past caring. He called the consul's hotel and got him on the phone the first time, which in itself was a minor miracle. He felt he was entitled to one such break.

The consul was sympathetic. Sympathetic and sorry. Law was law, he told Allen, and what the captain was doing was legal. Allen had better get himself a good Mexican lawyer, one who knew all about things like this. He was willing to recommend a half dozen.

Allen didn't listen any more. He jammed the receiver back on the hook and pushed the phone back to the captain. There was a long, loud silence.

"Okay," Allen said at last, speaking slowly. "I was away off base and I admit it. I killed a man. I attempted to get away. I've got no right being mad at you or anyone else. I'm the one everybody ought to be mad at."

The captain relaxed slowly and visibly. He wasn't stiff any more and the hatred was gone from his eyes.

"Thank you, *señor*," he said.

"And now what?" Allen asked, more relieved than he'd been all night.

"Now you need a lawyer," the captain said. "There are papers and bonds and bail and statements."

"At this hour?"

"I just left one at my house, *señor*, a good one, Arturo Elizondo Garcia."

Allen snorted. He knew the fat little brother of the captain.

"That's real chummy," he said. "It keeps everything in the family."

"Shall I call him?"

Allen remembered the fast action someone had succeeded in stirring up and he was afraid. He was tired of doing what the first guy who came along suggested to him.

"Get me Tony Mancer," he said.

"Tony Mancer," the captain echoed with disgust in his voice.

"He's a friend of mine," Allen insisted.

"You have bad friends, *señor*," the captain warned.

"He's the one I want."

## CHAPTER 2

TONY MANCER didn't waste any time when he got there. He'd been in Mexico too long for that. He just heard the words "auto accident," saw who was assigned to the case and begged the captain to get a lawyer, and the lawyer he begged for was Arturo Elizondo Garcia. He knew a mess when he saw one and he knew his way out of such a mess too.

The fat little lawyer was all smiles and perfume, but within ten minutes he was watching Tony Mancer lead Allen out of there as though he were a magician, magic wand and all.

"Mexico," Tony said happily. "Money makes the wheels go around." He broke off short at the unhappy choice of a simile.

They stopped at the spot where the man had lurched out into the road. There was nothing to see. The body had been taken away and the police had gone. The burros still fed on the grass of the river bank.

Tony led Allen away for a drink.

"Is this the end of it?" Allen asked. He asked that just to keep himself from thinking about the body hurtling past his windshield post.

"That did it," Tony assured him. "The dead man's family gets two years' wages. At forty cents a day that's about three hundred dollars. And another seventeen hundred for graft, bribes, fines and presents, and then everybody is happy. Mexico. You can buy anything."

"Whom did I kill?" asked Allen moodily.

"Who the hell cares?" answered Tony. "Some drunken Mexican who's better off dead and whose family is better off without him. Come on, let's get drunk."

The captain had said, "You have bad friends, *señor*." They were under the big sign of Tony's club. The words *Blue Gate* in Spanish and English flipped on and off. An attendant opened the door for them and Tony half dragged Allen inside.

At the bar, Tony ordered a double tequila for Allen and Allen let the drink stand untasted while he stared into the mirror.

"What's the matter?" Tony asked. "You still thinking about the guy you hit?"

"Yes," Allen said guardedly.

"Forget him. He's just another Mexican. They've got millions of them

here. Christ, if they can't make it to the States, they're better off dead anyway."

Tony turned to okay a check and Allen stared into the mirror while the sweat broke out all over him again. Now with all the liquor and the shock and the danger worn off, he was remembering. The man came over the top of the bank, right under his fender, almost rolling as he came. There hadn't been any outcry. With the top of the Jaguar down, he would have heard it, would have heard even a grunt. What man is hit without yelling?

And somebody must have been waiting in a car near-by, just waiting for it all to happen. How else could the police have been called so quickly, and known just what to look for and where to find it? How had they known he'd tried to run away? It didn't make any sense if it were just another Mexican killed by the wheels of just another car. Somebody must have pushed that body at his car, and it must have been a dead body that somebody had pushed. And then that somebody must have driven off to the nearest phone and called the cops, depending on the man at the side of the river bank to hold Allen there long enough for the call to be made.

That way, it did make sense. He'd been the fall guy for a murder, and if he wanted to get out of Monterrey and if he wanted to build that dam for Guadalajara, he had to keep his mouth shut about it.

He reached for his drink and his hand shook. He wondered if they'd known about the dam in Guadalajara, and if they'd deliberately picked him.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" Tony asked, and Allen didn't dare tell him.

The band swung into a solid, wild, jungle beat and Allen straightened up, glad of the excuse to get away from Tony. In the mirror he could see Juanita come out of her dressing room, half-naked already, and tearing at her clothes as she came as though they were choking her. The crowded night club burst into applause as her heels hammered at the floor and the clothes were ripped from her body showing her smooth, sleek, oiled skin. This was the Mexico these Americans had come to see and were paying for.

All except her hip-length mesh stockings and her high-heeled shoes and her arm bracelets were stripped from her by now and she went into action on the floor, writhing and twisting and hammering her heels in rhythm to the drums. The customers got out of their chairs and pounded on the tables and yelled at her and she screamed back at them, and Allen felt like screaming too.

This was the way it had been night after night, all the months he'd been in Monterrey and now it was the same way.

She finished her dance and disappeared into her dressing room leaving a dazed and restless mob behind her. The head-waiter suddenly appeared at Allen's side and led him to a ringside table. As he always did, Allen invited José for a drink, and as José always did, he sat gravely and ordered bottled water and only Allen knew the hatred that José had for all of them.

"You have an accident, I hear?" José said politely.

Allen nodded.

"We all have our troubles," José said then. Allen was still toying with his first drink.

"Someday I get her away from this," José said then, gesturing around the room and Allen knew he meant Juanita. It must be hell on a tough and Catholic Mexican to have his sister strip and contort like that four times a night, every night of the year while he had to stand by and watch. It could make a man go crazy, unable to protect his family from the disgrace. Allen thought again of Juanita's slim, hard body, so unlike the full soft bodies of other Mexican girls, and he thought of her long, lean legs and he knew something of what José felt.

"I killed a man tonight," he said then, softly.

José shrugged. "With a car. You didn't mean it. It was nothing."

Allen didn't answer that.

"You know who it was?" José asked. Allen stiffened at the guarded tone in José's voice.

"Not yet," he said.

José shrugged again. "No name, no friends, no nothing." He spat. "Hell with him."

"Do you know who it was?" Allen asked then, suddenly, watching José closely.

José was startled. His face lost its friendly expression. "How would I know?" he asked. "Pretty soon the cops will find out. Pretty soon everybody will know."

He got up as Tony came over. Allen could see why they called José the Dandy. No matter how he felt, he never showed it; he looked fine in the front he presented, handsome, well-built and perfectly dressed; the Dandy, even if his sister was a stripper and men had the right to scream and yell and whistle at her.

“Don’t look now,” Tony warned lightly. “My bouncer is watching you, and he sure doesn’t like what he sees.”

Allen deliberately turned toward the doorway leading to Juanita’s dressing room. The bouncer was draped across the doorway blocking it from one side to the other. This guy looked the part of a Mexican bouncer, even to the scar on his face. No wonder they called him the Blade; he looked like a knife man. The two men watched each other, Allen toying with his drink and the Blade toying with the watch chain that led to his big clasp knife.

“He’s mad because you came back,” Tony volunteered, laughing. Tony had a hell of a sense of humor, Allen thought. “He figured with you in Guadalajara he’d have a clear track with Juanita. Now you’ve cut him out again.”

Allen’s sharpened wariness warned him and nagged at him to get out of there, but he couldn’t go yet. He had to sit and wait until they found out whom he had killed. It was a hell of a feeling waiting to find out who your victim was.

The door behind the Blade opened and Juanita came out, dressed now in an American woman’s business suit that fitted her almost as tightly as her skin did. She came quickly to Allen’s table and the Blade trailed along. She sat down and took Allen’s hand and smiled and for the first time that night Allen felt good. The Blade stood beside her, facing Allen.

“I hear you killed a man,” the Blade said in his flat voice. “Maybe the man had a brother, maybe the brother will kill you like we do here in Mexico.”

Juanita’s hand tightened in warning to Allen, but Allen gently pulled free of her and stopped toying with his drink. He lashed his foot out into the Blade’s shin and without waiting for the gasp of pain, he reached up and gripped the Blade’s neck, forcing it down to the table. The Blade’s head hit with a thump, rattling the glasses and the bottles, and around them the conversation suddenly died.

Allen stood swiftly, still holding the Blade’s neck, and with his left hand, hooked into the Blade’s jaw. The Blade buckled and sagged, held up only by Allen’s grip.

“Don’t threaten me,” Allen said.

“Hey,” Tony said happily, “don’t mess up my bouncer. No one will respect him any more.”

The Blade winced at that and Allen held onto his grip.

“Who did I kill?” he asked. It was more than just a question to him now. It was becoming a prayer, a prayer for relief and from his own growing fear.

The Blade fought free from Allen’s grip.

“Who knows?” he said, and then José stood between them, smiling and self-contained.

“Go have a drink,” he ordered the Blade. “Don’t make a fool of yourself. Go have a long drink and cool off.”

The Blade hesitated and looked down at Juanita, and it was an instant before he had control of himself again and walked quietly to the bar.

“What the hell is this?” Allen asked angrily. “When I left less than three hours ago I was the hero around here. Everybody was my friend. Hell, they even gave me a banquet and a medal. I built them the biggest dam they ever saw and now I’m poison.”

“You killed a man,” Tony pointed out seriously. “They don’t like Americans killing Mexicans.”

“It was that Emily,” Juanita said angrily, illogically. “You never should have gone with her. She brings bad luck to every man who ever touched her. Look at what she did to Raul.”

Allen stared at her. What could blonde, beautiful Emily, clinging to every man who came along, have to do with this?

“Did you know Raul was missing?” he asked her.

Juanita shrugged the question away. “That bum,” she said, and Tony began to laugh.

“Emily said he’s been missing since this morning,” Allen insisted. “And he’s your husband, not hers. Didn’t you know?”

“He’s no good since Emily got hold of him,” she answered. “And Emily can keep him now. Soon the police will get him. Raul and I are finished.”

She didn’t want to talk about her husband any more. She tugged at Allen, trying to lead him to the dance floor, and her taut, sleek body rippled under her clothes as she bent over him. Allen could see the envious stares of the men around him. Even the Blade was watching them now, seeing her coax Allen.

Tony was still laughing and his laughter annoyed Allen now.

“What’s so funny?” he demanded.

“I offer her half this dump and she won’t even answer me, but comes a redheaded engineer and she can’t throw herself at him fast enough. What a country!”



“What a country!” Allen agreed. A country where one dame told you someone else’s husband was missing and where the missing man’s wife didn’t care about him but wanted a redheaded American engineer.

He led Juanita out onto the dance floor and with her head on his shoulder and her body locked against him, he forgot the man on the highway and the Blade and the police captain and the cops’ big ugly ten-shot automatics.

“Take me to Guadalajara,” she begged when she was sure no one could hear her. “There is no more fun in Monterrey for me and there we can have our good times again.”

He didn’t answer. He had a feeling he wouldn’t be leaving Monterrey for a long time.

It was one o’clock in the morning and the fun was just getting started at the Blue Gate. By two o’clock he was all in and he called the Hotel Ancira and got a room, but then it was time for Juanita’s act again and he couldn’t walk out on that. Not with the drinks going down and the glow sweeping over him.

When Juanita left to change for her act, the place began to get quiet, waiting for her to come on, and just about then Emily rolled through the front door. She must have a load on again, thought Allen, because she had his fat little lawyer with her and the lawyer had his fat little arm around her and his chubby fingers were manhandling her and she never would have allowed that in public unless she were out of control.

“Allen,” she yelled, pulling away from the lawyer and running over to him.

A sudden fear shot through Allen and he stood up and gripped her as though he could make her sober up just by shaking her.

“How did you know I was here?” he asked roughly, his fingers cutting into her.

“He told me,” she said, pointing to the lawyer.

Arturo Elizondo Garcia sat down heavily. He wasn’t any too sober either, but he heard the question and looked up.

“She called the police,” he explained. “She wanted to report a missing person.”

“Me?” Allen asked.

The lawyer shook his head. “That one’s husband,” he said, pointing to Juanita’s dressing room. “My brother can’t talk English so he turned her over to me. I took her report and I asked her if she had heard about you and then I

told her I was your lawyer and you were waiting here.”

All the glow had left Allen by now. He was clear and alert again. He felt that he could begin to act now. He felt that his waiting was ending quickly.

Arturo Elizondo Garcia chuckled. “Funny country, this Mexico,” he said. “The most beautiful lady in Monterrey calls the police to report a missing husband. Somebody else’s missing husband.”

“When did she call the police?” Allen asked. “How long after I left you?”

“Two hours, maybe—maybe three. I don’t know exactly.”

Something in the timing seemed wrong to Allen, as if all the clocks in Monterrey showed different times.

“What were you doing there at that hour?” he asked. “I dragged you away from a party. What were you hanging around the police office for?”

The lawyer drew himself up with as much dignity as he could command.

“You hired me,” he reminded Allen. “You hired the best damned lawyer in all Mexico. I do not sleep on a case, I work on it. And when I work, the dust flies, like you say in the States. I stay there all night, if I have to, until I finish.”

“You finished?” Allen asked, suddenly quiet while his pulse hammered and the sounds around him seemed to die away.

The lawyer grinned proudly. “Finished. Three hours and no more and all is finished.”

“Tell me,” Allen ordered, tensing himself.

The lawyer took his time. He pulled on his glasses, smiled at Emily, fully aware of the drama surrounding him. He pulled out a copy of a legal document and began to read.

“Comes now before me one Rosaria Maria de Salazar and she is duly sworn and deposes.”

“Without the trimmings,” Allen said.

Tony dropped down into a chair to listen. The fat lawyer threw a resentful glance at Allen.

“Best damned lawyer in Mexico,” he muttered angrily.

“Go on,” Allen said. He was fighting his nerves now.

“With her husband, Juan José Briones Salazar, and their two children, the boy Juan Jesus, and the girl Maria Elena, they come from Montemorelos this morning and he goes to seek work. He does not return, and waiting for him in the quarter known as Libertad, she becomes worried and frightened. In the night comes word of a man who was killed by an automobile and she fears it

is her husband. When the lawyer Arturo Elizondo Garcia spreads news that anyone missing a man of such and such an age can ride free in a taxi to identify this man, she takes such a free taxi and comes to look.”

He stopped reading and stared over his glasses at Allen.

“Best lawyer in Mexico,” he burred again. “All the taxi drivers work for me, spreading the word, for I make work for them. Thirty people come to see the body and it costs very little money.”

“What happened then?” Allen asked, waiting for him to get on.

“When she saw the body she let out a shriek you should have heard over here. ‘My husband,’ she screams. And she kisses him and hugs him and won’t let go. Then my brother, who waits with me, makes her identify the body legally and she signs papers and I mention all the money we’re giving her and she stops crying and she signs this quit claim and now you can to go Guadalajara in the morning as soon as you pay the fines and the fees and the costs. Best damned lawyer in all Mexico.”

Slowly, carefully, Allen let his breath out. He took the documents and read them for himself. They were all in order, even the quit claim the widow had signed for three hundred dollars.

All his worries had been for nothing—just a tequila hangover and a Mexican nightmare, brewed out of a blonde woman’s crying jag and a lousy street band and the smell of cheap perfume. But the man hadn’t cried out, and he hadn’t tried to save himself, and the cops had been waiting.

“What a country,” Tony grinned, pumping Allen’s hand. “Three hours for a deal like this. *Señor*,” he said, turning to the lawyer, “I drink to the best damned counselor in all Mexico.”

“I accept,” the lawyer said seriously.

Allen was drained, empty, wrung out.

“Why don’t you find Raul?” Emily asked, still on her crying jag. Allen could still feel her intense fear; it shot through him and became his fear.

“Raul is a bum, my dear,” the lawyer said. “He is no good. Let the police find him. That is a job for my brother.”

He raised his glass. Allen couldn’t tell how many other glasses the fat counselor had already finished.

“To Guadalajara,” he toasted. “May you build them as fine a dam as you did here and may the women be as beautiful and as kind.”

“Take me with you, Allen,” Emily begged “I’m sick of this town and I’m scared. No Raul, no Allen, just fat little lawyers who paw you when you’re

drunk.”

That would be the way they’d remember him, Allen thought.

Tony snorted again. “Comes the redheaded engineer and the two most beautiful women in Monterrey go crazy.”

Allen turned on him savagely. “Did you offer Emily half this dump too?”

“Emily?” Tony echoed, surprised. “No man offers anything to her except maybe a bed, and if he hasn’t got one, she’ll supply that too.”

Emily began to sob again and the lawyer looked shocked at the unnecessary insult. Allen felt dirty sitting there with them. He didn’t know what was the matter with him; he should be the happiest man in Monterrey, he should be buying drinks for the house, congratulating the lawyer, thanking Tony. Instead he wondered how he’d ever thought of this gang of strippers and nymphos and slick night club boys as his friends.

The band broke out into the solid wild jungle beat and Juanita came furiously out of her dressing room, slamming into her act.

Allen saw the glazed look come over the lawyer’s face at the sight of Juanita’s naked body. Curiously, he turned and watched the others, wondering if his face had shown the same expression. Every man in that place forgot his own partner and watched Juanita, nervously, enviously. And all Allen could think of now was the body slamming into his car and then slipping away.

As the bar the men lined up three deep, each one watching, each one imagining himself with her, each one knowing that Allen had had her. Allen felt as if he were being stripped alongside of Juanita.

Allen saw the police captain come in and stop too, transfixed by the sight of Juanita, and suddenly sick of the whole lot of them and himself too, he got up and left them, ignoring Emily’s cry and Tony’s laugh, walking back past the bar to the front door while Juanita writhed and rubbed her hands over her body and screamed back at the yelling customers.

“Take the blonde woman and go,” the Blade said when Allen passed.

“Go to hell,” Allen answered.

José was more suave. He caught Allen’s arm.

“You are leaving us again?” he asked. “My sister will be insulted if you don’t stay to the end of her act.”

It was no act; it was a public orgy.

He started past the police captain.

“A drink?” the captain asked.

Allen said no, thanks, and kept going.

“A talk, maybe?” the captain said then.

Again Allen said no, thanks.

“Then I come too,” the captain said. He said it regretfully, as though he hated to leave Juanita. He followed Allen out into the street and steered Allen to the police car.

Allen hesitated.

“Now what?” he asked.

“I have news,” the captain answered.

“Your brother told me.”

“I have other news,” the captain insisted. He held the front door open for Allen and waited. Allen got into the car and slid over to the far side.

## CHAPTER 3

CAPTAIN GARCIA switched the car's dome light on and fished in his uniform for some papers. "That blonde woman, that Emily, she called and said Juanita's husband is missing," he began. "But Juanita never reported that."

"I know," Allen said. He somehow had known they weren't done with him yet.

"Normally, I would never have seen that Missing Person report," Captain Garcia pointed out quietly. "But this time I was still in my office on your business, and my brother took the call and gave me the report."

Again there was a short silence. Through the open doors of the Blue Gate they heard the end of Juanita's dance and the screams of approval from the crowd. People began to stream out.

"And then?" Allen prompted at last.

"Everything was happening so fast," the captain continued. "I didn't like it. This Raul had a police record, so there on my desk was his description and there also on my desk was the description of the man you had hit. Not the marks you put on him with your car, not the blood and the broken bones, but the permanent marks, like scars, color of hair and eyes, height and weight—you understand. They were very similar."

The chill that hit Allen had become familiar by now. He almost knew what was coming.

"So you checked the man's body again?" he prompted.

"No, *señor*, I couldn't do that. The widow, she claimed the body and a hearse took it away. When I went to the address where the hearse left the body, there was no widow and no body. All I had left now was a receipt from a woman in Montemorelos. So I called Montemorelos and there was no Rosaria Maria de Salazar living there, and the man Juan José Briones Salazar still lives there and is married and is fifty-five years old and that is too old for the man you hit."

The crowd was heavy outside the Blue Gate now, scattering to the other bars along the street.

"The man I hit was Juanita's husband," Allen said as though talking to himself.

"The man you killed was Juanita's husband," the captain agreed. "You

are a skillful liar, *señor*. You had me believing in you.”

He said this almost regretfully, but Allen caught the threat hidden in the captain’s tone. With all that crowd around him, he felt hemmed in, trapped.

He turned to the door and reached for the handle. The captain had been waiting for that. He drew his gun and slammed it down sharply and the pain at first, too, was sharp when the gun hit, and then the pain dulled and Allen fell back against the seat, gagging and gasping for air.

Captain Garcia waited for the gagging to stop and then went on matter of factly.

“You have made a widow of Juanita, *señor*, but it will do you no good. Even your friend Tony, even my own brother, cannot help you now. For there is no more manslaughter to be paid for with a fine or a bribe. Now there is murder.”

Allen felt sound roar in his ears as his blood beat through the cut on his head. It mingled with the noise of the motor as the captain started the car and spun away from the curb using his siren to clear a way through the crowd. He ran down to the end of the street and out to the river bank, and there he shut off the motor and they sat in the darkness. In front of them, across the river, rose the mass of Saddle Mountain and beyond that was the dam he had built to give water to Monterrey. Maybe the captain thought this a fitting place to get rid of Allen.

“Talk,” the captain ordered, breaking the eerie silence. “You’re a great talker. Talk.”

He would beat Allen until Allen couldn’t stand it any more. He would beat Allen until Allen made another break for the door handle, but this time he would let Allen get out of the car. Then he would draw his big black automatic and he’d empty the magazine and some shots would go into the air and he’d yell “Halt” in case any stragglers were around, and the other shots would tear into Allen’s back and maybe rip up the Guadalajara contract on their way out of his body. Maybe one of the bullets would even nip the medal in his pocket.

All around them, the silence stretched. This part of town was deserted.

Allen weighed his chances. Either the captain really believed he had killed Raul or else he knew who had really pushed Raul into the Jaguar and, knowing, had to get rid of Allen.

“Talk,” Captain Garcia ordered again.

“I can’t talk to you. You’re crazy,” Allen answered. “You’re so full of

hate for the Americans, you're crazy."

If the captain didn't believe him guilty, he was sunk.

"A good beginning," the captain said. "You appeal to my honor. I like that kind of talk. Pretty soon you will attack me. Go on."

"You'd like that, you crazy, trigger-happy cop," Allen said.

"I would like that very much," the captain admitted. "Go ahead and talk."

"I can't talk to crazy people. You think I pulled Raul Aguilar out of the thin air and talked him into getting into my car and coming with me to the bank and then getting out again and lean over in the road until I ran him down. How can I talk to a crazy man who thinks like that?"

"I think Raul Aguilar was dead when you dumped him over the bank. I think he was dead when your car hit him."

"You're so full of hate you can't think," Allen said, praying that the cop's rigid training would keep him under control through all this needling. "Dead men don't bleed like that. You know that, not all over people's hands and fenders." He saw he had shaken the captain's conviction.

"You're a policeman and a good one," he said. "But you're so full of hate you can't think straight. How did I get Raul to change clothes? You really believe that while I was trying to get him to change his clothes, I was arranging with some woman to come and claim she was his widow? Why didn't I just take Juanita and go, instead of killing that bum of a husband of hers?"

"Because he would follow you," the captain answered, completely unsure of himself now.

"Better him than you," Allen shot in quickly.

The captain thought that over.

"If that blonde woman, Emily, hadn't called, there would never have been any connection between the man you killed and Raul. You would have been clear."

"That's what the killer figured," Allen insisted. "He didn't want there to be any connection. Emily loused him up."

Allen was sweating again. This thing had to end quickly. This kind of talk couldn't drag on; either you won fast or you lost fast.

"The killer was the man who pushed Raul," he hammered away. "I drove the car and my car hit him, but the man who pushed Raul was the killer."

"You're some talker," Captain Garcia commented, but there was a trace of doubt in his voice.



Allen leaned back, breathing slowly and quietly so that the captain wouldn't know how close he'd come to screaming and lashing out.

"I'm sorry I hit you," Captain Garcia said then, as though that apology cost him heavily. "But don't try to leave Monterrey," he warned.

He offered Allen a cigarette and took one himself, his eyes narrowed in thought. Allen's hands were shaking, but the captain seemed not to notice. He had suddenly remembered his manners.

"Who pushed him?" asked the captain.

"Who knows?" countered Allen, using the time-worn Spanish phrase, the most famous buck-passer in all Mexico.

They drove back to the Hotel Ancira and sat quietly watching the last stragglers stagger in. It was almost five in the morning. One half of the town was finally going to sleep while the other half, the working half, was getting up.

Allen felt as though he'd been steadily beaten from the time he'd first said good-bye to Emily. Beside him, Captain Garcia watched the night characters come singly and in groups; he knew most of them personally and he smoked while he watched.

Finally, Allen figured it was safe to leave. He held out his hand. "Till tomorrow," he said.

"It is tomorrow," the captain answered.

Allen watched him drive away. It had almost been worth a beating to have the captain on his side if only the captain would stay there. The way things looked now, the Guadalajara dam was a long way off, as far away as murder could take it.

The clerk didn't have his key for him. A visitor had come and insisted on waiting in his room and the clerk had let her in. Her, thought Allen, groaning.

"Blonde?" he asked.

"The dark beautiful one," the clerk answered. "The one who just became a widow."

Everyone in Monterrey knew about it by now. They must think him one hell of a big man, widowing a woman so he could take her to his bed and then getting her to wait for him in his room while he sweet-talked the cops out of the mess he was in. All on the same night he had killed her husband. And they would know all about Emily too, how he'd killed the man she'd stolen from Juanita. It was real chummy, a real Mexican romance, the kind of thing that a Mexican could appreciate. Even if it took a murder to accomplish

it.

He let himself into his room quietly. Juanita was asleep on the couch, and for just a short while he stood looking down at the woman he had widowed. Then he tiptoed to his bed and lay down, keeping his clothes on, hoping the bed wouldn't squeak. He felt the pain where he'd been hit, but he was too tired even for pain to keep him awake. He fell asleep just as the sun rose over the top of Saddle Mountain.

He woke up choking and gasping for air, and he fought the hands that were gripping his throat, but they came away too easily so he opened his eyes and he was looking up at Juanita and he could tell by the frightened, bewildered look in her eyes that she hadn't been choking him at all. She'd been leaning over the bed, stroking him. He smiled up at her and she lost her frightened look. She smiled back at him and leaned over to kiss him. Then he sat up.

He was soaked with sweat and the sour smell on him sickened him. He wondered how she could stand it and then he remembered that Mexican women were used to taking a lot from their men. He put her gently on the bed and went into the bathroom.

When he returned, showered and shaved and with his bathrobe on, she was still waiting for him on the bed. She'd sit like that forever, waiting. Just like a trained dog. But then he remembered her on the night club floor and he knew how her fury could break out of her and spread around her until everybody near her could feel it.

He called the desk and ordered breakfast for himself and then decided the hell with it, everybody knew she had spent the night in his room anyway, and he ordered breakfast for two. When he'd checked out of the hotel after the banquet last night, he'd had the best reputation an American could have in Mexico, but by now it was hanging in shreds. The Guadalajara crowd wouldn't let him come near their job when they heard about it.

After they'd eaten, he lit a cigarette and then lit one for Juanita. She still waited.

"Do you know you're a widow?" he asked suddenly.

"I heard," she answered.

"Did you hear that I killed Raul?" he asked.

She shivered a little. It was rough, the way he said it.

"I heard," she said again; her eyes showed puzzlement.

"Goddam it," he yelled, exasperated. "The first thing you did when you

heard was to make a beeline for my bed and yet you knew I'd killed him." He calmed himself after a moment. "Did you know he was pushed under my car?"

Her eyes widened.

"Pushed?" she asked.

"Pushed. Somebody was waiting with him near the highway and shoved him right into my car. He must have been unconscious—he didn't try to get away, he didn't yell when I hit him, he just bounced and went back over the bank."

He watched her closely. He had suddenly remembered the guy who always hung around her and ran her errands and protected her in the streets—the guy they called her Shadow. That guy would do anything for her, anything she asked for, anything he might think she'd want. He'd kill for her if he thought she wanted that.

"Who pushed him, Allen?" she asked.

It was a hell of a question. Maybe she had, or maybe the Shadow had, maybe her brother. Nobody had more reason than she and her brother.

"I don't know who pushed him," he admitted. "But I'm going to find out. I can't leave Monterrey and I can't work anywhere in Mexico until I do find out. I don't care who did it, I'm going to find the one who pushed Raul."

And then, for the first time, she got it. Her face suddenly became drawn and sad-looking as though he had beaten her.

"You think I pushed him?" she asked softly. "You think maybe I had the Shadow push Raul into your car? Your car of all the cars in the world?"

"I don't know," he said again. "I don't know anything yet. I don't know where you were after I left the club, or where the Shadow was or where José was—" He broke off suddenly at the stricken look on her face.

"My brother," she said as though she hadn't thought of that before. He could tell she didn't think it impossible. She looked as though he had smashed that thought into her head and that now it was there, it would never leave her again, as though she had suddenly remembered something.

"What is it?" he asked. "What are you thinking of? Did José suddenly disappear from the banquet? Did he make an excuse and leave right after I did? Well, did he?" he demanded. "Did he take off and follow me and Emily? Did he know where I was all that time?"

She gasped as he caught at her wrists, but she didn't answer and it was then that Allen caught the sound at his door. He shoved her roughly aside and

leaped away from the bed as the door almost burst open, and quickly as he moved he was almost too late. The little guy, the one they called her Shadow, was on him, clawing at him, trying to get his knife into Allen.

“Juan, don’t,” Juanita screamed, and her scream ripped through the man and made him hesitate. Not for long but just enough for Allen to smash down at his knife hand and send it skidding into the carpet.

It couldn’t last long without the knife. The Shadow leaped for Allen’s throat; he’d bite Allen to death if he could, but Allen slammed down again and this time his fist connected with the man’s face and the face seemed to crumble as the man fell. Allen picked up the knife from the floor and slipped it into his bathrobe pocket.

Slowly, the little man came to and he dragged himself to a wall and hitched himself erect, inch by inch. He braced himself with his palms and looked over at Juanita to make sure she was all right and then he was ready for Allen again. He was one hell of a shadow, thought Allen. If it weren’t for his love of Juanita, he’d be an animal, but he had that love so he wasn’t an animal; he was a man and he could scheme and think and kill. Allen reached out and pinned him to the wall.

“It’s all right,” Juanita said gently then. “I’m all right, Juan.” She was the only one who ever used his name. The Shadow relaxed and looked at Allen, waiting, and Allen let him go.

“You heard,” Allen accused him. “You were out there, listening.”

“I heard,” the Shadow answered.

“Did you push Raul at my car?”

The little man shrugged. “If it were necessary, I would have done it, but it wasn’t necessary.”

That was a real Mexican answer, thought Allen wearily. These guys loved double talk. He could beat the man to death and not get another answer out of him. He fished out the knife and returned it.

“Thank you,” the Shadow said. These Mexicans were a polite people.

He herded them out of the room and rode down to the ornate lobby with them. José had been waiting for them, and seeing him was a shock for Allen. The brother waiting in the lobby while his sister spent the night in a room with another man. While they walked over to José, Allen kept feeling that he was dreaming all this.

“Your lawyer and Tony are in the restaurant waiting for you, but I want to talk to you first,” said José.

Allen followed him to an empty corner of the lobby. From where they stood, they could see the restaurant doors. If Tony and the lawyer should leave, they would see them.

“You know about Tony and me and the Blade?” José started softly. It wasn’t what Allen had expected to hear.

“A little,” Allen answered. He closed his eyes, listening to the voice alone, trying to remember if it was the same voice he had heard on the river bank last night. It wasn’t, and he concentrated again on the words themselves.

“You know he took us both out of jail and gave us jobs and then gave us each a part of his night club?”

Allen hadn’t known that. That sure didn’t sound like Tony, the guy who hated Mexicans but loved dollars.

“That was very good of him,” he said sarcastically, trying to see an angle for Tony in this. He knew Tony had seen an angle for himself.

“It made me very indebted to Tony,” José admitted. “I brought Juanita to the club and she became a star. That didn’t work out well but I couldn’t know at the time. So now, I owe Tony much.”

Enough to murder? Allen wondered why José was telling him this.

“And to the Blade, too, I owe much, for we worked together when we came out of prison, and sometimes we played together.”

He looked at Allen to see if Allen understood. Allen understood.

“Now,” finished José. “You are deeply in trouble and in one day you have become my best friend.”

Allen almost gagged on that but he let it ride.

“With my sister’s husband gone, with my sister in love with you, with me wanting her out of this life so much, you are my one best friend.”

“Listen,” Allen said heatedly. “There is nothing between Juanita and me.”

Too late he remembered that Juanita had spent the night in his room and you don’t tell a Mexican his sister spent the night with you and still doesn’t mean anything to you.

José reddened slowly at the direct insult. His hands shook as he fought his temper, and Allen could see how close he’d come to the edge of his control.

“Still,” said José when the fit had passed, “Juanita loves you and she has a way with men.”

“I am glad you forgive me,” Allen said sincerely.

José seemed not to have heard him.

“Do you remember who was at your banquet last night and who wasn’t

there who should have been?”

It was one of the main things Allen had been thinking about. There had been too many of them to keep track of, but with the hint José had given him he did remember.

“It comes to me,” he said slowly. “At first the Blade was there and then when Emily began to act badly, he wasn’t there any longer.”

“I didn’t like to say that,” José went on. “I know that you must suspect all of us, even me, but that is the way I remembered it.”

Allen waited.

“Let us go and ask him,” José offered.

Allen needed time to think about the swift deep friendship he had just won from the man who was most likely to have gotten him into the mess.

“Those two in there are waiting for me,” he stalled, pointing to the restaurant.

“Juanita will hold them for us. I will tell her to.”

He was too eager, too ready to help. Like the man in the road had been.

“First I must talk to my lawyer,” Allen insisted. “Then we will ask your friend about last night.”

## CHAPTER 4

HE LEFT José and went slowly into the restaurant.

The little fat lawyer was having breakfast. He was working on a steak and eggs and a whole plate of greasy, fried potatoes, and he kept slurping the mess down with black, sweet coffee. His face glistened the way it had when he'd watched Juanita writhing naked on the dance floor.

"What's new?" Allen asked lightly when the greeting formalities were over.

"What's new?" the lawyer sputtered with a full mouth. "Me, he asks what's new? If I'm your counselor, I want a conference with you."

"Soon," Allen promised. He turned to Tony. "Do you remember who stayed and who didn't after I took Emily home last night?"

"Are you kidding?" Tony came back at him. "There were about five hundred people there and not one of them spent the whole night in my joint. Everyone of them took off with a girl to one of my private rooms, or went for a ride up Saddle Mountain to look at your dam or some other damn thing. The only guys who never left were the waiters and the musicians. And me."

That last "And me" was what Allen had been waiting for. Tony knew.

"Where is the great lover rushing off to?" the lawyer asked, winking at Allen. Everyone in Monterrey would be telling the story of how he had widowed the hottest girl in Monterrey and had her in his bed the same night.

"What a man," Tony grinned.

"What a man," the lawyer echoed.

What a fall guy, Allen thought.

"Mexico," Tony said. "I love it. Everything goes."

"Even murder," Allen said savagely.

"Forget that guy," Tony urged as if he hadn't heard that the guy was Raul. "It was an accident."

"It wasn't an accident," Allen said sharply to get it out in the open. "Somebody pushed Raul into my car. Somebody lay along that bank waiting, and when I came along, that somebody pushed Raul right into my car."

Tony and the lawyer froze in their chairs.

"Tell me that again," the lawyer ordered, mopping his head.

Allen spelled it out for them. All the coincidences, all of them, the cops coming so swiftly after him, the man by the roadside, the failure of Raul to

cry out or try to save himself—all the careful planning that had been wasted because Emily had gone on a crying binge and decided that two men walking out on her in one day were too many. Only that had prevented Raul from being buried as *Señor* Juan José Briones Salazar, and Raul himself from being just another line in a Missing Person report.

“Jesus,” Tony said. “But it still has nothing to do with you. All you did was get unlucky and come along at the wrong time. For that you pay a fine, that’s all.”

“You are in a big trouble,” the lawyer said gravely.

That made three people who knew it now, Allen thought viciously—the captain, the lawyer and he, himself, and if he could keep yelling loud and long, there might be even more.

“Did you pull José and the Blade out of jail and make them partners?” Allen asked Tony sharply, not to give him time to think.

Tony was embarrassed. “I couldn’t run an all-night joint like the Blue Gate myself. Those two guys know all the angles and all the big shots that have to be greased. I’m just the front man for them. They own the joint.”

The lies were starting to pile up around Allen and he didn’t know how to start sorting them.

He looked over to the doorway and Juanita came in on cue. He hung around for a while and then excused himself and went out to José. Behind him, the Shadow took up his post near the restaurant doorway, watching his beloved and beautiful Juanita, and beside him, sure and graceful, walked Juanita’s brother.

Allen felt surrounded. Juanita, Raul, the Shadow, José, the Blade, Emily, Tony. The names were dancing in his head. Who had wrecked the Jaguar?

They swung out of the big doors and after the coolness of the hotel, the outside air seemed superheated and Allen could feel his clothes become saturated while he stood at the curb.

“We’d better take my car,” José said tactfully. “Yours isn’t ready yet.”

Allen followed José into the hotel garage. The attendant came running with the keys and Allen climbed inside, sat on the hot, itching car seat.

“Where to?” he asked.

“The club,” José answered.

The heat beat against them and the dust blew into the car and settled against Allen’s skin. He made no attempt to try to figure what José was really thinking. He would find out soon enough.



They found the Blade in Tony's office, feet on desk, half-asleep. José swept his feet to the floor. That woke the Blade thoroughly. He came to like a cat, balanced, standing ready for anything that faced him, one hand hanging loosely near his pocket almost touching the knife that was folded there. Then he saw who had awakened him and he let himself relax and he grinned at José's little joke.

José wiped the grin off. "My friend and I, we have questions to ask you," he said shortly. "Wake yourself up and listen."

"Then I am not your friend?" the Blade asked, getting it fast.

"Not until you tell me where you went last night after Allen left."

The Blade stared at them as though they were crazy. "Is that all?"

"That's all," José assured him. "Where did you go?"

The Blade laughed mirthlessly. "Drunk so early in the morning," he said, "celebrating Raul's death and the new brother-in-law. Go away, lovers."

Anyway, here was one person who hadn't heard about Juanita's being in his room all night, Allen decided.

José stood quietly, unmoving.

"Where were you?" he asked again when he saw the Blade wasn't answering him.

The Blade dropped back into his chair and put his feet up on the desk again

"Here," he mumbled. "Asleep. You know that."

José knocked his feet off the desk again. "I don't know that," he said.

"You know it now," the Blade told him. The fun was gone from his voice.

"You believe him?" José asked Allen.

Allen wondered if this was an elaborate charade they were putting on for his benefit.

"I don't know," he said.

"I know," José went on, turning back to the Blade. "I know and I don't believe you."

"Then get out of here."

José's hand flashed and his knife was out and pointed at the scar on the Blade's face.

"You remember this knife," José said.

The bouncer stared at the knife and then up at José and then over to Allen as though all three were strangers to him. His eyes were blank and Allen shivered.

“I remember it,” he said.

The fine, almost invisible point aimed at his forehead and cheek and hung so steady that the highlights on the polished surface didn't flicker. The Blade was making no attempt to move; he even seemed to have stopped breathing. That knife point would be imbedded in his eye or throat before he could even tense himself. He sat limply in the chair and his dark, almost black, pupilless eyes stared up expressionlessly at José.

“You remember it then,” José said. “Good. Then tell me where you were.”

“The last time,” the Blade reminded José, “I didn't tell you anything either.”

“The last time was in prison and I only had time for one pass with the knife. Now there is time enough. Where did you go last night?”

The Blade spat. “Butcher,” he said contemptuously. “Cut me into sausage. I tell you nothing.”

It was a game they were playing, Allen decided; nothing was going to happen.

He was wrong. Something did happen.

The knife point flashed and a new line appeared beside the first scar, faint and thin. It didn't turn red; it was faint and pink, so faint it was almost invisible.

But the Blade flinched. He wasn't as hard as he had thought he was. No man was when José wielded the knife.

“I went to see the lawyer,” he said finally in a flat tone. He said it regretfully as though he was sorry he wasn't man enough to keep his mouth shut after he had made his brag.

Allen felt the air flow slowly back into his lungs. José relaxed a little too, as though he hadn't believed it was going to be this easy.

“What did you go see him for?” Allen asked.

The Blade turned his head away, listening, and Allen heard it too. A car door slammed outside the window and Tony yelled, “Blade,” so loudly that the sound came into the room as if Tony were standing beside them.

The Blade took a chance. “Here,” he answered. Then he grinned. “Here in the office,” he called out.

The pounding feet of two men came closer. The fat lawyer was with Tony. José didn't wait for them. He moved around the chair until he faced the door and now his knife point lightly touched the back of the Blade's neck.

That was the tableau Tony broke in on and it stopped him at the door. The lawyer had to push him out of the way. For an instant the five men stood fixed, unable to move, and the room seemed quieter than a room can be.

“What the hell is coming off here?” Tony demanded, his eyes flicking over the scene.

“Murders, assaults, knifings,” counselor Garcia complained. “My brother gets me the best assignments. What am I, an ambulance chaser?”

Allen was coming out of the nightmare. Tony’s appearance couldn’t be a coincidence; there weren’t any more coincidences in his life. Everything that happened to him had been planned to happen.

“What are you doing here?” he asked Tony.

“I saw you leave with José,” Tony answered. “And that phony stall of Juanita’s made me suspicious, and when I asked the attendant in the garage, he told me you were headed here.”

The only words Allen had spoken to José had to be said in front of the garage attendant.

“All right,” he said then. “I’ve got some questions to ask you two now that you’re here.”

“Us?” Counselor Garcia widened his eyes. “We’re not under suspicion of murder. You are. You told us so.”

Allen moved between them and the door. “That’s why I’m asking questions,” he said. “I’m under suspicion with your police brother and maybe with you too, but I didn’t push Raul, I just hit him. I was just the deadly weapon and I want to find out who used that weapon. Right now I want to find out who lied about who owns this club and why he lied. Who does own it?”

They were all enemies suddenly and only last night they had all been friends.

Tony broke the ice.

“Let’s cut this comedy,” he pleaded. “Christ, Allen, I know how you feel and I sure don’t blame you for feeling that way, but I didn’t lie to you. I own twenty-five percent and that’s all. I’m just a front man here.”

Allen looked at José.

“I have twelve percent,” José added. “The Blade, here, also has twelve. We thought Tony had the rest.”

Allen turned back to Tony. “Who has the rest?” he asked quietly.

Tony glanced at the lawyer and then looked swiftly away, back to Allen,

hoping Allen would understand what he was trying to signal. Allen understood.

“You fat little son of a bitch,” he said bitterly. “You’ve got the rest, you own this whole damn business, and you never told me.”

“You never asked me,” the lawyer protested. “In Mexico we don’t go around telling everybody what we own, like you do in the States. You know that.”

Allen knew this much was true anyway. They even passed crazy corporation laws to make it possible to hide the real owners of companies; corporation papers had from five to fifty dummy names listed and the amount of ownership of each name was never given. That was taken care of in secret, private agreements, agreements no one ever recorded.

The Blade figured that José wouldn’t do anything in front of all these witnesses, so he took a chance and got out of the chair. He was right. José let him go and shut his knife.

“I can see the spot you’re in,” Tony said finally. “Either they find the guy who pushed Raul, or you’re through in Mexico. But look where that leaves us. Last night we were all your friends and look at us now.”

“Yeah,” Allen said sarcastically. “Look where that leaves you.”

He walked out of the room, leaving them to settle their own arguments. He got into a taxi and rode back to the hotel. Then he called police headquarters and demanded his car. What he had just found out convinced him that there would be no more trouble from the police.

They had already released his car; they had even ordered a mechanic to repair it for him. No wonder the captain had been so easy to convince last night. He had known all along that his brother owned most of the Blue Gate and that Raul worked for the night club. All the time Allen had been so damned clever, that crazy, American-hating cop was just sitting there, knowing that. Fear shot up in Allen when he realized how close he had come last night. If he had panicked, if he had tried to run, the captain would have shot him down happily. But he hadn’t shot Allen down. Something had stopped him, and now he couldn’t squash the case fast enough to suit him and his family; he couldn’t get rid of Allen fast enough.

Allen remained in his room waiting. He knew enough of these people to know that Captain Garcia would come to offer him peace terms, liberty, almost anything he wanted just to get rid of him. But this time it was Allen who wasn’t interested in having anything fixed. For a change, he would be

doing some shoving and some bargaining.

He didn't have long to wait. The captain showed up before lunch and called from the lobby. Allen let him come upstairs.

Captain Garcia looked as worried as he felt. He was alone; he wouldn't want any witnesses to this meeting.

"How are you today?" the captain started.

"My head hurts," Allen answered, rubbing it in.

"I'm sorry about that," the captain said. Damned right he was sorry, Allen thought. The captain must be wishing he had hit harder or not at all.

"What's new?" Allen asked.

"We can't find out a thing," the captain admitted. "We can't find the woman or the two children, we can't even find out who she really is. We can't locate the body. We don't know what happened to Raul, or when he came to Monterrey, or when he left it. All we know is that he's dead and you killed him. The medical examiner says he was still alive when he hit your car, but that he might have been unconscious."

That was one thing that checked, Allen thought.

"And the blonde woman, Emily?" Allen asked. "What does she say?"

"That one," the captain snorted. "She is drunk and crying and calling for Raul and for revenge and for you, all in the same breath."

"So now what?" Allen asked.

"Now we go on with the investigation but it no longer concerns you. You are clearly out of it and not responsible for more than a little drunken driving."

A little drunken driving, a little killing, a little loving and a little framing, that was all.

"We're going to close the case soon," the captain added hopefully. "After all, nobody cares about this Raul. He was a bad character. He begged to be killed."

He watched Allen for a reaction.

"The hell you're going to close this case soon," Allen warned him grimly. "You're going to keep this case open until you find the one who pushed Raul."

"But, *señor*, that is impossible," the captain protested, flushing. "We have nothing to go on."

"That's real tough," Allen said. "And I'm very sorry for your brother and the reputation of your family. But how about my reputation? Maybe Raul

begged to be killed, but he didn't beg me."

The captain was the one who was sweating now.

"But you are clearly out of it," he said again.

"You tell that to the Guadalajara people," Allen went on. "Will you give me a letter of recommendation to the Guadalajara officials?"

Captain Garcia didn't get it yet.

"Me?" he asked blankly. "Gladly, but what good will that do you? I'm just a police captain."

"Exactly. You're just a police captain with a big, famous family to protect. Will the governor write a letter telling Guadalajara it was all a mistake and I did not kill anyone and I did not sleep with the widow of the man I murdered on the day I murdered him? Will he?"

"I can't say what the governor will do."

"You know damned well he won't do that. Not until he is told who did push Raul. And the Guadalajara people will believe what they hear because these things seem true."

The captain nodded, unhappy, unable to refute Allen. "They seem true," he admitted. "Even though we know now they are not true."

"Yet they seem true," Allen said again.

"You are right," the captain said and suddenly he didn't seem unhappy any more. "You are completely right. I did not think a redheaded one like you would accept such a way out." He sounded as though the whole idea had been someone else's.

"So now?" Allen asked.

The captain stood up and paced the room and after a while he stopped pacing and planted himself in front of the window, hands clasped behind his back. The butt of his automatic pointed at Allen from its holster.

"I could have shot you last night," the captain said in a low tone, reflectively, spacing the words as if they were thoughts to be hoarded. "But I didn't," he went on, as though thinking aloud, thinking of himself and his brother and his family. "I didn't," he repeated and then paused, while Allen waited.

"It is a good dam you built for us," he said at last, nodding in the direction of the river bank and Saddle Mountain. He turned slowly from the window and faced Allen. His hands were still locked behind his back.

"So now we go to find this pusher, this killer of Raul. You and I and my policemen will find him." He didn't seem unhappy anymore. He had tried to

quash the case for his family but now he seemed glad that he had failed.

“Your own brother is in this,” Allen pointed out, not yet sure of the captain’s sincerity.

“My own fat little brother,” Captain Garcia agreed. “Always he was a problem to us, that one was.”

Allen waited.

“I have a paper here,” Captain Garcia, said anxious to prove he’d meant what he had said. He pulled out a flimsy police report. “A car was found abandoned just outside Laredo on the Mexican border. It was stripped clean of everything except the bare frame, but it belonged to this Raul. So, clearly, he was on the border yesterday.”

A slow excitement came up in Allen. Maybe this guy was levelling after all.

“You didn’t tell that before,” he said.

“I hoped it wouldn’t become necessary. Now it is necessary.”

“What more?”

“The Mexican police had been waiting for Raul at the border. It seems they suspected he carried something he wasn’t allowed to have.”

“Like what?”

“Like cigarettes—narcotic cigarettes. Many of them.”

Emily’s crying jags and her big affair with Raul, Allen thought suddenly. It had been queer, her taking up with him, even stealing him from Juanita. They had thought too much liquor had caused her to do that. Liquor, hell. It was dope.

“And Raul ran from them?” he asked “Someone must have warned him. He ran and left the car, knowing that thieves in the night would strip everything, every shred that could become evidence.”

And then maybe Raul had come back to report to someone at the Blue Gate, and knowing that his car would eventually be identified, maybe he had demanded protection, threatening to expose the club, and then maybe someone had slugged him and dragged him to the river bed to dump him there. Under Allen’s car. Under Allen’s car where, disguised as a peon and claimed by a phony wife, Raul would be safely buried and never turn up again except as an unsolved and unlamented missing person.

Only Emily had botched that and now he had to see Emily. He had all the answers now, all that he needed except one thing. Who pushed Raul?

“So now?” he asked again.

“Now I have to find out for whom he carried those cigarettes,” the captain said, unhappy again.

“Maybe he carried them for himself,” Allen offered, still testing the captain’s sincerity.

“Then why was he killed? And why was he killed the way he was killed, so no one should know he was killed?”

Allen could see what the captain was thinking. José might kill Raul, but José would do it with a knife. So would the man they called the Blade. Tony could plan such a deal, but the thing was so typically Mexican, it even smelled Mexican. A smart Mexican lawyer, the best damned lawyer in all Mexico, could plan such a thing; he’d probably heard about many incidents like this one and he probably had defended half a hundred criminals who would be glad to do this for him just to have him under obligation, a favor he’d owe them for a future pay off.

No wonder the captain was unhappy.

Allen felt a new respect for this cop who knew what he was getting into, how his family would ostracize him, how he would be pointed out as the man who had betrayed his own brother and yet was willing to go from step to step, searching for the man who had pushed Raul. This cop, if he were on the level, was doing this only because he felt it was his duty. Allen knew now what had stopped the captain last night.

“You are quite a man, *señor*,” Allen said softly.

“I am glad there is one who thinks so,” the captain thanked him. “Even if that one is a murderer who sleeps with the women he widows.”

He forced a grin at his own joke. It was a weak grin. He obviously didn’t feel like grinning.

It wasn’t until the captain had left that Allen remembered he still couldn’t trust him.



## CHAPTER 5

HE SETTLED down to wait for Emily. He could call her, but he preferred to have her get in touch with him, and if he was beginning to see daylight, then she should be calling soon.

It was evening before she called. The clerk asked if he should send her up and Allen could tell that even the well-trained clerk was disapproving of a guy who not only took the widow, but even the girl friend of the man he had killed.

Emily came into the room and Allen studied her for some signs of the dope addict, or the alcoholic, or the hard, fast life she had lived since she had come to Mexico. There just weren't any signs of anything. Those signs would have to appear sooner or later, but right now she was still fresh-looking, and unspoiled-looking and she was still the most beautiful woman in Monterrey.

"You look terrible," she told him.

He almost wished he could say the same for her. It would simplify matters for him if she had a dope craving that showed. He could shove her around then. But she looked sweet and innocent, and he realized she wasn't even drunk yet. It was the first time he had ever seen her so late in the afternoon without a load on. She was being careful.

And then the thought hit him that maybe she had a dope supply hidden somewhere, maybe even the same supply that had been stripped from Raul's car. He became alert again.

"I warned you not to leave me," she reminded him.

"Why?" he asked. "What did you know?"

"Raul left me and then he disappeared and everyone I called told me he hadn't been there. So I got scared. I figured someone was after everybody who came near me." Allen laughed at her silly lie.

"Some jealous guy?" he asked. "Some guy dying of love for you?"

She let that pass.

"Take me to Guadalajara with you," she said suddenly. He could tell she meant this. He was her last chance out of the mess she had gotten herself into.

"I can't go," he reminded her. "I'm right in the middle of a murder. Remember? You warned me."

"They can't hold you, Allen," she protested, her eyes widening.

"They are holding me," he said, wondering at her surprise. "I can't leave

Monterrey. I've been warned not to."

"But you couldn't have killed Raul," she said then. "You were with me. I'll tell them."

"I did kill him," he answered bluntly.

Her mouth opened. "But—" she started and then shut up.

"What time did Raul leave you?" he asked.

"About ten in the morning."

"Where was he going?"

"He said he had to go to the club."

Again, Allen became excited and fought not to show it. "Whom was he going to see there?" He made his voice casual.

"Juanita and the rest of them. He told me he'd call me in a couple of hours. He was going to take me to your banquet. That's why I kept calling for him. Is it important, Allen?"

He thought it over slowly. If that was all Raul had told her, she wouldn't have been so panicked when he'd taken her home, so afraid to be left alone. Guys like Raul always made appointments and then broke them for some other woman. She knew that.

"You were so damned worried about him while I was with you," he reminded her. "You were sure something had happened to him."

"He promised to call me and he didn't, and then he wasn't at the banquet. I figured something must have happened."

Why was she taking all these questions from him, he wondered. She didn't have to do that. She could just get up and walk out.

"You're lying," he said flatly. The time had come to back up his suspicions.

"Allen," she protested sharply. "Don't talk to me like that."

"You're lying," he said again, coming closer to her. "You didn't figure something had happened to Raul, you were damned sure of it. You knew it."

He caught her wrists and pulled her close to him. He was becoming an expert at shoving women around.

"You knew what had happened to him at Laredo," he accused her. "You knew he was in a jam and was going to the club for help. That's why you were so sure he was in trouble when he turned up missing for just a few hours. He must have told you the trouble he was in."

"I didn't know anything, Allen," she pleaded. "All I knew was that he didn't call me like he had promised."

“You’re lying,” he told her again. “And I’m going to get the truth out of you if I have to beat it out.”

“Don’t hurt me,” she begged. She was shaking now. “You know I can’t stand pain.”

“You’re going to stand plenty of it,” he warned her.

He slapped her deliberately with a hard flat slap that spun her around. She crumpled into the chair but he pulled her up again.

“Don’t, Allen,” she begged.

“Tell me,” he ordered.

“I told you.”

He slapped her again. She fell again and he hauled her up again and he was beginning to feel sick now. He’d had the wrong kind of training for this kind of life. He raised his hand again.

“Please, Allen,” she whimpered like a little child. She hid her head against his chest as though there were no other place of safety in the world for her.

“Tell me,” he ordered, keeping his voice hard, knowing he wouldn’t be able to hit her again.

“I knew,” she sobbed.

When he had run away from the body on the bank, he had been filled with self-disgust. Now he had the same unclean feeling of shame. His engineer’s hands—hands that build things, not destroy—now had learned to beat women until the pain became too great to bear.

“Tell me,” he said. He was surprised his voice was still hard and commanding.

“I went to Laredo with him,” Emily said. “Just before we reached the border, somebody was waiting on the side of the road and signalled us down. He told Raul something and Raul got scared.”

“What the hell did they say?” he demanded.

“How should I know?” she flared back at him. “You know I can’t talk Spanish.”

He remembered it was true. All the years she’d bummed around Mexico and all the Mexicans she had bummed around with and she still couldn’t talk the language.

“Then what?” he asked.

“He drove on for a mile or so, turned into a field and left the car. He didn’t take anything, just left it and said the car would be stripped before the

Federal cops could find it.”

“You knew what he carried?” Allen asked.

“Of course, Allen. Why do you think I’d been hanging out with him?”

His guess had been right on the nailhead.

“Go on,” he said.

“He got somebody to drive us back to Monterrey and then we took a taxi to my room.”

That was that then. All Allen had to do now was to find out whom Raul had called at the Club—José, Tony, Juanita, the lawyer, Shadow, the Blade. That was all. Unless it was some other stranger who was meeting Raul there, someone Allen had never heard of. It was real easy.

“Why did you lie to me?” he asked then. “You knew the jam I’m in, you knew you could help me, but you didn’t. Instead you lied. Why, Emily?”

She was looking at him as though he were a stupid kid who had to have everything spelled out for him.

“Allen,” she said gently. “I couldn’t go around broadcasting about Raul and me. It isn’t something I’m proud of. And you were the last one in the world I wanted to know about it. I kept hoping you would take me to Guadalajara with you, and I knew you wouldn’t if you found out.”

He didn’t tell her she had as much chance now as she had had before—none. He had hurt her enough. Wearily, he wondered if what she had told him had been worth it.

“I’m sorry I made you hit me,” she said then, suddenly, surprising him. “It must hurt a man like you to hit a woman.” What could you do with a dame like that, he wondered. The tramp was a lady.

He took the lady to dinner.

All through the meal, he kept watching her for some signs of drug addiction. She just didn’t show any. She couldn’t have doped herself before coming to him. He would have been able to spot that; he knew the signs backwards. She hadn’t had anything more than two cocktails since she’d come to his room and that wasn’t nearly enough to hold her together if she were addicted, but she showed no signs. Maybe she had that kind of iron control, but he didn’t believe it. She had lied to him again.

A Mexican would do almost anything for a blonde, beautiful American woman, and Emily had been free and easy with them. There must be quite a few men around who could be persuaded that she would be their lover if only they could get rid of a jealous Raul. He pulled his thoughts up short. He was

suspicious of everybody; he'd suspect the captain next. And yet, the thought hung on.

Outside the restaurant, in the big, lighted central plaza, the Posada was forming. Girls were starting to parade around the big square and the men were starting to form their line and march slowly in the opposite direction. Emily and Allen watched the lines grow longer and the flirting get under way. It was an art, the way the lines never altered or slowed, while the men and women managed to make dates for a later hour, and struck up acquaintances without even seeming to notice each other. It was a masterpiece of Latin romancing.

"It's been a long time since I was in one of those things," Emily remembered sadly. "Take me around a couple of times, Allen. I guess you owe me that much."

He reddened, remembering the slapping he had given her. He paid their bill and they went out into the Plaza. This was a fine time for him to become romantic, he thought.

Someone had been waiting for him at the hotel doors. He felt a hand strike his and leave a slip of paper there and when he turned, he saw a small boy, shoeshine box and rag, sprinting away from him. He left Emily and chased the boy, tucking the paper away as he ran.

The boy darted out into the Plaza and tried to lose himself in the crowd, but Allen hung on, gaining, and finally the kid, winded and scared, ducked into a corner of the park and waited, panting, hands still gripping the shoeshine box.

"Who gave you the note?" Allen asked grabbing him and shaking him roughly. Now it was kids, he thought desperately, but he was learning how to live with this new feeling.

"Who knows?" the boy whimpered, frightened. A crowd and two policemen were closing in on them. Allen knew he didn't have much time.

"Tell me quickly," he said. "Or I'll kill you."

"A man gave me a peso and pointed you out. I swear it by the Virgin."

The kid was crying now, and Allen had to give up. He wasn't showing that note to cops yet, not until he had had a chance to read it himself.

He apologized all around, tipped the cops and tipped the boy and, ignoring the muttered threats of the crowd, he walked slowly back to Emily.

"What was it?" she asked.

He didn't answer. He pulled out the note and held it up to the light of a

window. Emily leaned over his shoulder, trying to see, and he tightened against her for an instant and covered the writing, but he remembered that she couldn't talk Spanish and he relaxed again.

The note was formal and flowery, as if the writer was unable to read or write and had hired a public scribe to do the writing.

"Esteemed sir," it read in Spanish. "A poor woman am I and not above earning an honest peso, but when it comes to murder, this the Virgin Mary has forbidden me to do and has directed me to confess to you. Now I await you, I and my two children in the Village of Guadalupe at the end of the Street of the Fifth of May. May you come at once."

No public scribe had written that note; no one had ever dictated a note like that to a public scribe. The "widow" of Raul was holed up not more than ten miles from where Allen stood and she had gotten religion and there was no telling how long her mood would last. The last line in her note was a plea for speed; she must have felt herself in danger. Maybe the man or woman who had sent her to claim Raul's body knew where she was. Whatever her reasons for speed, they were urgent enough for her to have taken this desperate way of getting in touch with him and now they were just as urgent for him as they were for her.

"You going out there?" Emily asked quietly.

He pulled away from her as though she had burned him.

"I thought you couldn't understand Spanish," he said.

"Not when people talk it. It's easy to read though. Don't go, Allen. It's a trap."

"Maybe," he agreed, but he wasn't paying any attention to her warning. He knew he was going and he knew he couldn't take a chance on leaving Emily behind. He pulled her into the hotel garage with him and headed for his car, hoping it was ready. He didn't stop to examine the repair work they had done on it; he still couldn't face up to looking at that right front fender.

"Get in," he ordered.

"Allen," she protested. "Don't go."

"Get in," he yelled suddenly, pushing her and she could see how close he had come to breaking.

## CHAPTER 6

SHE CLIMBED slowly into the low-slung car. She wasn't even settled before he gunned the motor and the tires squealed and burned on the concrete and the powerful Jag roared and Allen spun the car out of line and raced for the front doors. They spun through recklessly, horn blaring to scatter the slow-moving pedestrians who still were engrossed in the Posada. Allen had to slow down to get around the milling, good-natured crowd; they wanted to stop him. The men stared and whistled at Emily and the girls smiled and flirted with him, but he bore on, sweating at the delay, blowing his horn and waving them frantically out of his way until he had inched his car past the big plaza and was finally out of the mob.

Then he really opened the Jag out and let it roar, accelerating from one corner until the middle of the next street, and then slamming his brakes on until he skidded to an intersection and could see that no one was coming. Then he shot ahead again in a spurt of dust and horn blowing. He hoped a motorcycle cop would catch him at this drag run. He could use a police escort on this mad drive, but this was the one time when no one worried about the crazy American speeding through Monterrey in his gray Jaguar.

"May you come at once," the note had said. He was coming at once, he thought grimly.

He finally passed the big steel works and was out of Monterrey. The highway was dark and almost deserted and the Village of Guadalupe was only four miles away. Those four miles took him three minutes, but he didn't want to think of the time it had taken him to weave out of Monterrey, even with his reckless driving and the chances he had taken.

His spotlight showed him that there were no street signs in the Villa de Guadalupe. He'd have to guess his way. He stopped the Jag at an open bar, almost driving the car through the swinging doors.

"Where is the Street they call the Fifth of May?" he yelled at them.

He could have slugged these people then, he could have run them down with his Jaguar. They began to play the big national game of "Let's talk it over." Which Fifth of May, Monterrey's or the Villa de Guadalupe's? What number? East or west? What was the name of the one he wanted to see? Finally they took a consensus and one of them pointed farther up the road and said six blocks.

Allen drove away again, swearing. Six blocks. That could mean four blocks, or ten or fifteen. What they meant was that if some crazy realtor ever subdivided this mess of dust and mud houses, and if someone else posted signs on the subdivision streets, it would be between four and fifteen blocks from the bar to the corner of the street which showed on the village maps as the Fifth of May. And the woman had pleaded with him to come at once.

He kept the spotlight shining now, and about a quarter of a mile down he saw the cobbled street which ran across the highway. He turned into it, searching for a sign, a clue, but there was just dust surrounding a few unpainted plaster houses. It looked like a lane of chicken coops.

He stopped the car, and the sudden quiet hit him like a wave that had just caught up with him. He started to get out and the shots blew up the quiet of the night and the bullets ripped into the car trunk and sprayed around him and splattered against the plaster houses. They had been waiting for him.

He slammed Emily down on the seat and sprawled over her. He recognized the bark of automatics—big, ten-shot automatics, clean police automatics, shot by men who never missed. He thought of Captain Garcia and how hard a Mexican could fight for the reputation of his family.

There wasn't any use in waiting for those automatics to empty their magazines. Each cop would have three or four more loaded magazines in his left hand and each cop had practiced until he could dump an empty magazine and insert a fresh one and commence firing again, all in exactly one second flat. Allen knew that; he'd seen it done, he had even done it himself. He was trapped.

He wondered why they were firing from behind him; they must know their chances of hitting him through the curving trunk and the leather seat were small. And then he knew what they were doing and his skin crawled and he had to fight himself to keep from running, from jumping into that stream of bullets.

They were creeping up on him. Under cover of their murderous fire they would rise up flush with his car door and they would send their big, tearing bullets into his body.

Emily was quiet now, huddled against him, and he wondered if she had been hit. As though she knew what he was thinking, she reached up and pressed his thigh.

"I warned you," she said. It was a hell of a time to say I told you so.

She could have set this trap herself. He had never given her a chance to



get away from him once she had seen the note.

Slowly he opened the car door. Bullets ripped into it and ricocheted and whined into the night. He made himself ignore them. He kept his hand on the door handle, glad now that the damned English built their car doors backwards. The door was a shield.

He pressed his cheek against his arm and bent low, staring down at the cobbles beneath him. He could see. He could make out the edge of the street. Bits of broken stone cut into the body of the Jag, but the open door protected him. He shifted into gear and moved out of there, slowly at first, then faster, his skin crawling over his skeleton as it tried to draw him out of the path of the flying bullets. But he kept his arm taut, and he fought the pressure of the wind on the door and he kept the car moving, bumping over the cobbles, afraid he would hit a rock and wreck the car.

The shooting stopped and headlights flashed on behind him and he knew they were chasing him, whoever they were, and then he sat up, slammed the door and raced the magnificent car the hell out of there.

The closely set headlights behind him told him that their car was a Land Rover, a big jeep, the same kind of vehicle the cops used.

He ran away from them easily while he looked for a side street to turn into. There wasn't any side street; the Fifth of May was all the street there was. The cobbles ended abruptly and the street became a rutted, stone-choked country lane, lined with a few scattered houses. And then he was at the end even of the country lane and ahead of him was the last house, the one the note had mentioned, and he was trapped again.

But this time he had gained a few seconds and some running room.

"You stay here," he ordered Emily. "Keep down on the seat until I draw them off. Then get the Jag out of here and call Tony."

He jumped out of the car and sprinted for the house.

He didn't reach it.

All at once, as though they had been signalled, a gang of them poured around the corners of the house and cut him off; they had been waiting for him there, too. Behind him the lights of the Land Rover were bright and near and Allen knew that it wasn't the cops that were after him. There wasn't a uniform in the lot of them as they charged him in the light of the Land Rover's headlamps. He ran back to the car and looked in at Emily. She was still huddled on the seat, obeying his orders.

"Don't call Tony," he whispered. "Call the cops."

He cut away from the Jag out into the empty fields. At first he ran low and when he was sure they couldn't hit him at this distance, he straightened up and let his long legs pick their way over the broken, rubbled field.

The lights behind him swung off the lane and the big jeep came whining and grinding behind him. Its four-wheel drive gave it traction and it bumped and ground and whined after him and he was just a damned rabbit trying to get away from the hounds and the rabbit didn't live that could outrun that pack of hounds. There wasn't any cover for him, but he was running, just running for the exercise of it, just running because a man doesn't stop running when he knows he will be killed as soon as he does stop. A man runs until he can't run any more and then he runs some more and then something in him breaks. He falls and he tries to get up and he can't and then he doesn't try, but he sobs, and then the sobbing stops and then he doesn't give a damn any more and he lies still while they come up on him, their big, clean, murderous guns in their hands, their faces all wrapped up in satisfied grins because they caught their rabbit.

They threw a sack over his head so he couldn't see. That was all they did to him. They didn't tie him up, they didn't have to. There wasn't any more fight in him and they knew it. Just a sack to keep him from running again, not to hide their faces from him. Just the old Mexican Sack Game.

"Where's the Blade?" someone asked.

The shock that hit Allen was physical. The bastards weren't even hiding who they were from him. They were that sure he would never be able to use that information, they were that sure he would never leave this field alive.

"He is coming soon," answered a soft, slurred voice. "He had business in that house."

Allen knew that soft voice; he had been listening for it ever since its owner had helped him at the side of the river bank. Now he had found it, now when he couldn't use it any more.

"You hit a big rock this time, *señor*," the voice said to him. It sounded almost sad. "I cannot help you move it this time."

Allen's breath came back to him and then he jumped up, running away from the direction of the voice. He couldn't see and he reached up to the sack and a knife slashed out at him and his hand fell away bleeding. He stopped running.

"That was a good cut, Blade," someone said, and Allen knew the Blade had come back.

This was the Mexican Sack Game.

Allen sat down quietly.

“Get up and run,” the Blade’s voice taunted him.

Allen sat.

“Make him run,” the Blade ordered.

There was silence while Allen braced himself for the next knife thrust. He knew they could make him run. They could make him do anything they wanted him to do. This was a real old game and everyone knew all the rules and the fine points. When they were through with him, there wouldn’t be a piece of flesh left on his bones, but he was a long, long way from that stage and he had a lot of slow dying to do before he got there.

There was a crackling sound near him and he smelled the fire of green twigs and leaves. He pulled away fast from the sudden burst of heat and again he jerked at the sack and again the knife cut him. This time, the second cut was no more than an inch from the first, neatly parallel. There was another shout of approval.

“Why?” he yelled desperately. “Why?”

“For the game, *señor*,” the Blade answered. “You owe us a little amusement.”

Allen located the Blade by the direction of his voice and he dove for him, hoping to come to grips or else get the one big knife thrust that would end the game at once. But Blade was too old a hand for that trick, and the third cut sliced his hand half an inch from the second one.

They threw him back near the fire and the fire kept getting bigger.

“You like our game?” the Blade asked.

He was leaning over Allen now and Allen could imagine the knife point aiming straight at him, poised, waiting.

From the road came the wail of a siren. There was a shout from the crowd around Allen and he prayed the Blade had looked up at the first sound. Allen sprang from where he was, driving his head straight up. He hit sickeningly against the Blade’s jaw and began to black out, but he couldn’t let himself black out now. He struck at the same spot with his fist and then followed up with his bleeding, paralyzed right hand and again with the good left and all the blows landed, and then he struck again but this time there was nothing left for him to hit. A body crashed near him and he smelled burning clothes and flesh and he tried to claw him away from the heat and pull the sack from his head at the same time. When the sack came clear, he saw the men scattering

across the field and from the lane behind him came the big lights of the police cars as they ripped across the field ignoring their broken springs.

He turned back to the fire again, knowing that he was too late. The Blade was too far gone to be saved. Allen pulled the burning body out and slapped at the fires with his sack, and by the time the cops had reached him and Captain Garcia stood by his side, only the skin and flesh were still smouldering.

Allen looked down at his bleeding hand. He hoped the tendons weren't cut, and while a cop bandaged him skillfully, he flexed his fingers, ignoring the blood that spurted out when he did that. His hand still functioned. The Blade hadn't been ready for the tendons yet.

"Did Emily call you?" Allen asked.

The question sounded foolish as soon as he had asked it. The cops couldn't have gotten there so quickly in answer to her call.

"I had a complaint about a stolen Land Rover and another report about a Land Rover without lights patrolling the road. Then someone called about a gang of men prowling the fields around here and you turned up missing. That garage attendant told me how you tore out of his garage and he showed me the marks of your tires on his clean garage floor. You owe him a tip, that one, he has much work to do to wash that floor."

Allen wasn't listening. He was staring back at the lane where another police car was parked. His Jag stood directly in front of the police car, clearly outlined in the big lights.

He started to run towards it and Captain Garcia followed. The Jag was empty. There wasn't any Emily. And then Allen turned slowly and looked up at the last house in the lane.

It had been a trap all right, just as Emily had warned. Now he had to find out what kind of a trap and who had trapped whom.

He started to run again, and once more Captain Garcia followed him. They got inside the door and Allen tried to turn the light on, but it wouldn't work and they had to wait for a cop to bring a flashlight.

She was lying in bed and although Allen had never seen her before, Garcia recognized her at once.

"The 'widow,'" he breathed.

The "widow" had gone to join her "husband."

In deference to the fact that she was a woman, and that her bed had an altar to the Virgin Mary over it, and that there was a crucifix around her

throat, the Blade had been merciful to her. Even so, she had known what was happening to her, for her eyes were open, staring straight ahead of her just as they must have been when she had first seen the Blade come through her door.

Allen turned away.

“And Emily?” he asked Garcia. “Didn’t you see her on the road?”

“No,” the captain answered curtly. His voice made Allen move away.

Captain Garcia, a tough cop of this tough Mexican city, was angry and ashamed. In front of this American, he was ashamed of being a Mexican.

“Take it easy,” Allen said softly. “We have them in the States too.”

In a few minutes a cop brought a spare bulb and screwed it into the one socket that hung from the ceiling on a dirty cord. That lighted up the poor room with its one cheap bed and the one-burner oil stove and the two cheap chairs and the colorful, chipped pots and the altar and the dead body on the sagging broken mattress. There were no other rooms in that house; this was all the house there was.

“Who was the man in the fire?” the captain asked. “Did you know him?”

At first the question sounded strange, but then Allen realized the captain hadn’t had a chance to examine the body closely.

“The man they called the Blade,” he said.

“And they were playing the Sack Game with you,” the captain said softly. “You are a lucky man, *señor*.”

As if Allen didn’t know it.

“You are thinking, no doubt,” the captain went on, “the Blade worked for the Blue Gate and that my brother is the chief owner of the Blue Gate.”

It was exactly what Allen had been thinking.

“So now what do you think happened?” Garcia asked courteously, but defensively.

Allen shrugged. “They found this woman and they held her while they wrote the note and had it delivered to me. Then they killed her and were ready to kill me. Only the Blade had a personal grudge to settle with me and he delayed the killing too long. You saw to it that it was too long.”

“I am glad,” the captain said, as though begging Allen to remember that.

“I, too, am glad,” Allen pointed out courteously. These Mexicans never forgot their manners, but what Allen was really saying was that he would never doubt Garcia again, and that he would trust the captain with his life, if need be, from now on.

“And you can think why they did all this?” the captain asked.

“I can think,” Allen joked.

“They were going to kill me and hide my body and then strip and destroy my car. Then it would seem as though I had run away to the States and the whole case could be closed and buried, just as I and my car were to be buried. With this woman dead, no one would be able to tell, except the ones who had killed Raul and this woman and me.”

“I am glad it ended this way,” Garcia said.

Allen tensed again wearily as though he had been waiting for this to happen. The captain’s family was reaching out again and exerting its invisible pressure.

“What is ended?” he asked warily.

“The Blade killed Raul because he wanted Juanita himself, and because he wanted Raul’s narcotics run, and because he knew that with Raul in trouble with the Federals, this was a good time to do it. Then the Blade tried to make everything look like an automobile accident. Then came his bad luck—picking the wrong car for his plans and waiting too long tonight.”

He held out his hands to show it was all finished and tied up with a pretty pink ribbon.

“There are still some missing points,” Allen pointed out.

“Like what?”

“Like two children, like Emily, like the private army the Blade suddenly surrounded himself with.” He watched the captain for a reaction and then took a chance and shot the next sentence at him. “Like the man who hired the Blade to do all this,” he said.

Captain Garcia’s face showed the shock and then became a mask again.

“We will find the children,” he said at last. “And Emily is doubtlessly in some cantina drinking and crying. No one hired the Blade—he worked this for himself. Now you can go to Guadalajara and build the biggest dam in Mexico. Everyone is happy, *señor*. Leave it that way. The case is ended.”

Everyone was happy, Allen thought, looking at the bed again.

“For you, perhaps, it is ended,” he said. “You have a family. I have no one but myself. For me the case is not ended. Not yet.”

He moved away from the captain and went slowly out of the house and towards his car.

## CHAPTER 7

THERE WAS a shout behind him and he turned. He didn't know what he expected to see but if it had been Garcia, gun in hand and the safety off, it wouldn't have surprised him much then.

It wasn't Garcia. The cops had found the two kids hiding in the field. They turned the scared, crying, hysterical youngsters over to Garcia and then went on searching for Emily.

The two children didn't know anything. They had heard the shooting and the car chase and their mother had sent them into the fields to hide. Then they had seen the men break into their house and they had seen the fire being lighted in the field. That was all they knew.

"You see?" Garcia appealed to Allen again. "They know nothing, for there is nothing more to know. It is all clear."

Suddenly Allen didn't give a damn. He knew the Blade could never have thought up this scheme to start with. The Blade would slash his way out of a jam, he would never think his way out. But it didn't make much difference any more. Officially, the case could close the way it was. The Guadalajara crowd would be satisfied and he could be a big hero again.

What made an American so damned stubborn anyway, he wondered.

"The case is closed?" Garcia pressed hopefully.

"We'll see," Allen answered. It was the second most famous comeback in Mexico.

The cops came back with three men they had caught in the field.

The men were handcuffed with their hands behind them and the cops had given them all a preliminary roughing up. Now they were forced to sit in a circle, back to back, each one with a fishing lantern throwing a brilliant beam into his face. Over the whole scene the headlights of the police car threw a harsh, shadow-filled light.

Allen could see that Garcia didn't want to question them. Not there, not in front of him. But he waited stubbornly; Garcia would have to throw him out bodily.

The silence was broken only by the crying of the children.

The waiting got on everybody's nerves.

"Very well," the captain submitted finally. "You have a right to know."

He turned to the prisoners.

“Your names,” he said curtly, not even looking at them.

The first two mumbled something and were told to speak louder. They did. The third man was silent.

“Your name?” Garcia demanded from the silent one, the man who was suddenly stricken dumb.

“He carries rocks for a living,” Allen guessed suddenly, loudly and clearly. The third man looked up, scared, the beads of sweat running down his dust-grimed face.

“You know him?” Garcia asked.

“I think of him as a voice,” Allen answered. “Twice I have heard his voice and both times it gave me pain. This will be the third time.”

“Talk,” the captain ordered.

The “voice” was silent.

“Talk,” the captain ordered again. His heavy boot caught in the man’s side, and he fell, gagging and retching and choking on his own vomit. Captain Garcia kicked again, in the same place, and now the prone man hardly moved. Allen thought his kidney must have burst.

Pain brought him around again, and one of the cops pulled him up into a sitting position.

“Now,” Captain Garcia said, “will you talk?”

The soft, slurring voice told the man’s name. As soon as the name was out, the man gasped for air, turning sick again. And Captain Garcia kicked him for the third time, and the man fell unconscious.

It was expert, thought Allen. Soon he wouldn’t be able to lie if he wanted to; anything they wanted to know he would tell them, if he knew.

When he came to this time they had to prop him up.

“Who hired you?” the captain asked.

Allen could see the concentration on the man’s face as he looked at them. Even with all that pain, even knowing he mightn’t live through this sort of questioning, he was trying to decide why the captain kicked him and what they wanted to hear from him. Allen turned away.

“Who hired you?” the captain asked again, raising his boot.

This time the man seemed to know what was wanted.

“The man they call the Blade,” he gasped, choking on the words, becoming sick again.

He had just saved his own life, thought Allen. He had thought his way out of the mess he was in.



“Who else?” the captain bored on.

“There was no one else,” the man swore desperately. He knew he was on the right track. He hadn’t been kicked again.

“Who else?” Allen demanded, planting himself in front of the man. “Who else, Voice? Tell me or I will take up the questioning.”

Allen raised his foot to emphasize his question and the Voice stared at him expressionlessly, waiting for the shoe to rip his guts again. Allen knew it was no use. He could beat him to death and still the answer would be the same. The man knew he might come out of this crippled for life, but as long as he said the Blade he’d come out of it. As long as he said nothing but the Blade. It was a magic word.

“You see?” Captain Garcia asked.

Allen saw. The Voice saw also, because when Garcia kicked him again, he rolled from the kick this time and lay flat and unmoving and they let him rest. He had earned his rest.

They took the three men away and a special car came for the kids while a truck took the woman’s body away. The Blade had been put into one of the broken cars in the field. Everything was wrapped up and just as they were ready to leave, another car came along with Emily and more cops in it.

She had been in a cantina all right and they had found her drinking at a men’s bar where women weren’t allowed. That was why they had taken so long to find her; they had never thought of looking for her in a man’s cantina. They didn’t know Emily.

Allen didn’t know whether he was glad to see her or not.

“Why didn’t you take my car like I told you to?” he demanded. If she had driven the Jag away they wouldn’t have tried the Sack Game with him. Capturing the car would have been too important.

“I couldn’t drive that monster,” she protested. She was drunk now. “I couldn’t drive it the way I felt.”

The way she had felt, all she could do was get drunk while a bunch of crazy toughs worked him over.

“Why didn’t you call the cops?” he asked her then.

“I did call them. But I figured they’d get here too late to do any good. So I turned into the nearest bar and I was trying to make a deal with the guys there to come and help me. I offered them anything they wanted, money, me, anything but they didn’t believe me. They just kept buying me drinks.”

Close by, Garcia listened, not understanding what they said but knowing

that Allen had become exasperated.

“And now the case is closed?” he pressed Allen.

“Now the case is closed,” Allen conceded.

He turned sick to his stomach when he said that, but there was nothing else to say. He was clear of the murder charge, but the morals charges no one had put in writing would never leave him. He had been lied to, made a fool of, shot at, chased and carved up like a fowl. He had had to stand and stare at the body of the woman who had played “widow, widow,” while her two kids hysterically screamed for their mother when they no longer had a mother. He had heard how Emily had offered herself to a bunch of leering Mexicans if only they would help him and he had known that her story was an insult to his intelligence, and he had seen the captain kick the testimony he wanted out of the bruised body of the Voice. And now he couldn’t find anything to say except to parrot the captain’s voice and admit the case was closed.

He was sick of himself.

He drove Emily home and dumped her fast. He felt a tug of remorse about leaving her alone among the wolves, but she wasn’t his problem anyway, and wherever there were men who liked women, she would make out. He drove back to the hotel. He would have pulled right out of Monterrey if it weren’t for the big, ugly bullet holes all over the Jag’s rear deck and left door. Even the skillful body man who had fixed his front fender would have a job with that deck and door. They’d have to fly parts from Los Angeles to repair that car now.

The clerk handed him a telegram. It was from Guadalajara telling him that the job had been postponed for a few days and that they would let him know when it was on again. He knew how to translate that double talk. The boys down there were taking no chances; they were giving him just a few days more to get out of the mess he was in, and if he failed, they would get another engineer. This was just a formality now anyway. With the case closed, Captain Garcia would take care of the telegram in a couple of hours.

The clerk told Allen that Juanita was waiting for him in his room again. That too, didn’t matter any more.

He went on upstairs, and Juanita wasn’t asleep this time. She was sitting on the couch waiting, and when he came into the room she sat up straighter and her dark eyes bored at him.

“The great man comes,” she greeted him sarcastically.

“Cut it out,” he answered roughly. He went to the dressing-table mirror

and stared at himself. He couldn't meet his own eyes in the mirror and he knew he couldn't meet hers.

"Soon he goes to Guadalajara for more honors and more women," she needed him.

"Very soon," he agreed. He would have to learn to live with that.

"I say you are not going," she announced.

"Okay, so you say I'm not going. I'm going anyway."

"I still say you are not going," she insisted.

Something in her voice made him whirl towards her. She was holding a small, ridiculous-looking gun and its muzzle pointed right at his eyes. He had never seen a gun held steadier.

He sat down slowly on the bed. He couldn't be afraid of Juanita; he had made love to her too many times.

"Looks like I don't go to Guadalajara after all," he joked.

It was the wrong thing to say. Her face lost its impassive mask and broke and her hate leaped out of her. Her hand trembled. She left the couch and came close to him and now he could almost feel the muzzle touch him, just under his nose, pointed at a neat deadly angle towards the back of his head. José must have taught her that. It was expert.

"You joke," she said in a low, tense voice. "After what you did to José, you joke."

He stared up at her, blankly. Even now, he couldn't be afraid of her.

"Go ahead, deny it," she yelled at him, jabbing the gun hard against his upper lip.

He squinted down and saw that the safety was off. Now he was afraid.

Carefully, he moved his head back from the gun, moving slowly until he was lying on the bed. He never stopped staring at her, holding her eyes fixed on his.

"You look like a gunman's moll," he said gently. "Now put that thing away and tell me what you're hollering about."

"In the fire," she half yelled, half sobbed, working herself up to where she could pull the trigger. He saw the hysteria rising fast. "My own brother and you let him die in the fire."

He held his breath an instant as her meaning became clear to him.

"That was the Blade," he said softly. "Not José. José wasn't even with them, was he?"

"You're lying," she yelled.

He shook his head. "Not José," he said soothingly. "If I'm lying, you'll find out soon enough. The papers will have the whole story. It is all finished, Juanita. It was the Blade."

She wavered.

"José is gone," she said. "And a man called the club and I answered the phone and the man yelled, 'He is dead, he is dead, he died in the fire.' And José is gone, no one knows where."

A ripple of excitement ran along Allen's spine, but he never stopped looking at Juanita's eyes.

"It was the Blade I killed," he told her again like a hypnotist.

She wasn't sure any more. She could believe he would kill her brother, even kill him with a fire, but she couldn't believe he would lie to her. That was a Mexican woman for you, he thought. He wondered what made him philosophical at a time like this.

"Why would that man call you?" he asked her then, taking a chance.

It worked. The gun came down slowly.

"He didn't call me. I picked up the extension and heard."

"Who was the man on the other extension?"

"Tony," she answered.

"Tony? What the hell did he say?"

"He kept saying, 'Who is this, whom do you want, what the hell are you talking about?'"

Allen groaned. Leave it to Tony to louse up the one live lead that had been left.

"And you thought they were talking about José. Why?"

"José left early in the afternoon and before he went away, he kissed me. For the first time in years, he kissed me. And then, when I was sick with worry, that call came."

She shuddered, remembering, and he stared at her closely, wondering if this was just another act put on for his benefit.

"It was that damned Emily," Juanita broke out then.

"Emily? What the hell did Emily have to do with that?"

"She called him. Then he paced the office for more than an hour. Then he kissed me and was gone. Whenever that woman gets close to a man, there's trouble. First Raul, then you, and now José."

Allen thought slowly and carefully. He knew damned well José had not been in that field. And what would Emily call about? There wasn't any use in

asking her. He was sick of asking people who told him nothing but lies. He had to get it for himself.

He got it.

José was taking the run that Raul had given up. The run to Laredo, the one Emily knew all about. He had figured out a way to make money fast and get his sister off that dance floor. With Emily's prodding, he had figured it out.

"He'll turn up again," Allen said grimly.

"Where is he?" she asked. "How do you know?"

It wasn't something you tell to a man's sister.

He got off the bed. "Come on," he said. "Let's go see Tony."

"That one. What does he know?"

"Come on," he said again as though he were talking to a child. "It's almost time for you to go on again."

She shivered.

"José never liked me to dance like that," she remembered.

"Think of all the men who did," he joked. He put the gun away for her and let her out of the room. She followed like a child, and stood attentively while he told the clerk where he was going. He would never fail to do that again, he thought; he had been burned enough.

The club was filling up fast.

Lawyer Garcia was already at his favorite table, waiting for Juanita's dance. He wasn't waiting alone. Emily was with him, her clothes all changed, her face all made up, every beautiful hair in place. The fat lawyer was happy tonight, pawing Emily freely while waiting to watch the naked Juanita dance. He'd been pouring brandy into himself and the sweat stood out on his face and his lower lip drooped, but that didn't stop his fingers from working Emily over. She didn't even seem to notice; all she was interested in was pouring as much of his brandy into herself as she could hold. Allen felt sick again watching her. He went over to the table.

"What did you call José for?" he asked her mechanically, not expecting her to tell him.

She stared up at him, trying to remember, trying to concentrate on what he was saying. She was so far gone, he wasn't even sure she knew him.

"I never called him," she answered at last. It was all he had expected.

"Juanita says you did," he said dutifully, playing out the game.

"Juanita is a liar," she told him. The lawyer nodded agreement.

That was that. He had played enough detective with her.

He went looking for Tony and Tony was easy to find tonight, propped up against the cash register, counting the house and checking the receipts. Every day in every way, Tony got richer and richer and now he had a bigger percentage of the business than he had had the day before.

“Hey, Allen,” he burred when Allen drew near him. “I’m glad to see you alive, man. They tell me it’s all over and you’re in the clear. Imagine it being the Blade.” Tony shook his head. “This damned country,” he went on. “Your own partner can be a killer and you never know. Anyway, I get a cut of the shares he held.”

“And don’t forget that José is gone, too,” Allen pointed out sarcastically. “One more death and you’ll own the whole joint.”

Tony grinned.

“My fat partner is drinking himself to death. I’ll be the richest man in Monterrey in six months. I’ll be a goddam night club tycoon, that’s what I’ll be. What a country!” Then he stopped his clowning. “Don’t worry about José,” he said. “That boy will turn up. As long as Juanita is here, he’ll turn up. Even if he’s dead, he’ll come back to watch her.”

For an instant he continued to check the cash receipts. Allen watched him, noticing the large American bills the Blue Gate had cashed already.

“I guess you’ll be asking me about that phone call, next,” Tony went on. “There’s a friend of yours here who wants to ask me the same thing. Why don’t you wait for me in Garcia’s office and I’ll tell you both about it?”

Garcia’s office. Only yesterday it had been Tony’s office. Tony was coming real clean all of a sudden.

It was the police captain who was waiting, staring at the polished wood of the desk as though it were his enemy.

“You came to question Tony?” Allen asked.

The captain shrugged angrily. “Questions,” he snorted. “All they breed is lies. But I have to make a report and so I have to ask questions. It is my fat little brother whom I would really like to question, but how does one go about questioning one’s own brother?”

They sat silently after that, each with his own frustration. After a while, Allen found himself also staring morosely at the polished wood of the desk. The damned desk must be hypnotic, he thought.

Tony came in finally, carrying a tray of drinks.

They went through their little act.

“You had a peculiar phone call this evening,” the captain began.

“That screwy thing,” Tony cut in on him. “This guy kept hollering, ‘He died in the fire, he died in the fire,’ and ‘the redheaded one killed him, the engineer killed him.’ I couldn’t make head or tails of it. He wouldn’t tell me who he was or who the hell he wanted to talk to and finally he hung up. I called your office right away but you weren’t there so I left the message for you.”

“And you had no idea who it was?” Allen asked. “You never heard that voice before?”

“Hell, no.”

“Then, too,” the captain said, passing to the next subject, “there is the matter of the disappearance of José. You know nothing of that?”

Tony laughed. “José’s not gone. He’ll show up. As long as Juanita is here and some guy wants to get her, you can’t get rid of José.”

“But still,” the captain insisted, “one of your partners is dead and now this one is missing. It would be nice for you if José did not come back.”

“You forget yourself,” Tony said sharply, and he wasn’t a clown any more. “We know how the Blade died. And every time I gain, your brother gains. He gains more than I do for he owns more than I do. And if anyone is missing, your brother has more means of causing it than I have. Don’t forget that, Captain Garcia.”

He put a lot of emphasis on that “Captain Garcia.”

“Yes,” the captain said, unruffled. “That is undoubtedly so.”

For a few minutes Captain Garcia thought it over while Tony brought fresh drinks.

“*Señor* Mancer,” Garcia said at last, “I think you are a bad man. I think, too, that too many bad things are connected with this club. People die, others disappear, dope is smuggled in and out. I think I shall recommend that your passport be lifted and you be returned to the United States as an undesirable alien.”

Allen stared at the captain, unbelieving. Tony, too stared, but he believed. His face became red and his hands clenched.

“Of all the dirty Mexican tricks,” he yelled, and he didn’t care who heard his opinions of Mexicans now. “You get rid of me after the Blade and José disappear, so your brother will get the whole damned shooting gallery. If you think I’m standing for that, you’re crazy. I’ll break you first, you punk cop.”

Sweat broke out on the captain’s face as he fought with his temper.

“Nevertheless, I shall so recommend,” he insisted. “And now I want to talk to my brother and I would like *Señor* Allen to hear what I have to say.”

Allen knew what the captain would say to his brother. He would go through the routine of questioning his brother and then would order him to sell out his interest in the club. Then the case really would be closed, the witnesses scattered and deported and so bitterly estranged, there would be no contact between them. Bribes would pass hands secretly and the official investigation would close. Everybody would be in the clear, everybody but Allen.

It would be a real Mexican whitewash.

Tony called the lawyer over the house phone. Then he stared at the captain again, frowning. Suddenly he laughed.

“Crazy country,” he said. “Somebody’s always clowning. You had me believing it for a minute. Hell, you know damned well you can’t touch me. Your brother is in this worse than I am.”

He went out as lightly as he had come in, and the two men settled down to wait again.



## CHAPTER 8

THE LAWYER was willing enough to come, but first he kept them waiting until Juanita had finished her dance, and then when he did come, he had his brandy cradled in one arm and Emily cradled in the other. He took the empty chair near the desk.

“Come sit on my lap,” he invited Emily with a big show of ownership.

“Go to hell,” Emily said pleasantly. She looked quickly at Allen to see his reaction, but he kept his face turned away from her.

“You come now,” the lawyer ordered, slapping the desk sharply, showing his anger.

Emily laughed. “Don’t order me around, you fat little pig,” she said sweetly.

The lawyer’s lower lip drooped petulantly. The insult was too much for the police captain too. He planted himself in front of his brother and swung hard. His open hand left a full impression on the pink little face of the lawyer. The bottle of brandy fell to the floor and rolled away leaving a trail of pungent liquid.

“You will sell your share in this business before I close the case,” Captain Garcia said then.

Now comes the big payoff, thought Allen wearily. He wondered why the captain wanted both him and Emily there to witness it; Mexican families did not wash their dirty linen in public, let alone in front of foreigners.

“You go live on a policeman’s salary,” the lawyer said. “I can’t. I like this business.” He looked up at Emily and she waved to him. “I like this business very much,” the lawyer continued. “And don’t hit me again. I’m too fat to hit you back. It does you no honor.”

The lawyer was no cream puff, thought Allen.

Slowly the captain unbuckled his gun and dropped the gun belt, cartridge holders and all on the floor.

“Whom did the one they called the Blade take his orders from?” he asked.

“That I do not know, brother. He was one of my partners. I did not give him orders. Tony manages the club. Ask Tony.”

The captain’s palm lashed out again. The lawyer did not even raise his hands to protect himself.

“This makes you happy?” he said.

The captain slapped again.

“Go on and be happy, you crazy cop,” the lawyer said. Pain did nothing to him; it couldn’t even reach him, it seemed.

“Who gave orders to the husband of Juanita?” the captain asked.

“Juanita, no doubt,” the lawyer joked. With each answer Allen’s contempt for the counselor dwindled until there was no more contempt left. He had never dreamed that the comic little man could have so much guts.

“I’ll kill you,” the captain threatened.

“No doubt,” the lawyer answered with dignity. “That was always your way. You always used a stick or your fists or a gun.”

“We have caught a man whom Allen calls the ‘Voice,’” the captain said. “Do you know him?”

“Did he say it was José or the Blade who gave him his orders?” the lawyer countered, undisturbed.

The captain restrained himself. “I have found in his police record that you have defended him several times in the past,” he said coldly. He paused to let it sink in, looking at Allen as though he were appealing to Allen to believe in him.

Allen tightened. He hadn’t known that. This wasn’t a family whitewash he was watching. The captain was out for his brother’s blood.

“Your tricks saved him from prison several times,” the captain continued.

“No doubt,” the lawyer agreed.

“He did odd jobs for you from time to time.”

“He did,” the lawyer nodded.

Allen’s thoughts raced around and around. This funny cool lawyer and the strings he could pull and the people he could push around was nothing to laugh at.

“I’ll question that one some more,” the captain raved, almost forgetting himself in his anger. “I’ll question him until he can’t answer, until he can’t talk. And if he tells me anything that involves you, one little thing, you will not be a brother to me any longer.”

“Threats, slaps, insults,” the lawyer said coldly. “I’ll ruin you for this.”

“You already have, brother,” the captain said just as coldly. He turned to Allen.

“I am sorry, *señor*, but I made a mistake before,” he said formally. “The case is not closed.”

“So that’s what they mean by an open and shut case,” Emily joked. “Now

it's open and now it's shut."

That made everything just fine, Allen thought. Now the telegram from Guadalajara meant something. It meant there wasn't any job for him. He wondered why he didn't feel bad about it. He wondered how he could actually feel good about it.

"What have you got to go on, anyway?" Emily asked. "Just a little guy no one knows who says the orders came from the Blade? A little guy who'll tell you anything you want to hear and then change his story again? Why do you keep dragging us around? Let the case stay closed."

"Maybe this man that Allen calls 'Voice' could tell me something about you too," the captain taunted her.

"Sure, he could," she flashed back. "There isn't a man in Monterrey who couldn't."

Allen's breath caught again.

"You get out of Monterrey," the captain ordered her. "You get out of Mexico."

Emily just laughed. "Don't lose your head," she warned him. "I've got a lawyer to defend me, a nice, rolypoly little lawyer."

"Emily," Allen appealed.

"Sure, Emily," she repeated. Here came the crying jag, thought Allen. "Emily, please, in front of these strangers, act like an American lady should. Why, Allen, so you can be proud of me? If I'm a good little girl and behave myself, will you take me to Guadalajara?"

Allen was quiet.

Emily walked out of the room.

"There is something you forgot," Allen told the lawyer.

The lawyer looked at him, waiting, and Allen could see the respect in the little man's eyes. The damned bastard was actually afraid of Allen. Allen seemed to be the only man he was afraid of.

"What is that?" he asked.

"As long as this case is still open, I can't leave Monterrey."

That was not what he had been about to say and the lawyer knew it. The lawyer seemed thoughtful and concerned as he tried to figure out what Allen had really meant. Allen let him figure. Allen had become a master of the double talk himself by now.

"Will you come with me to question the 'Voice'?" the captain asked.

Allen shook his head. There just wasn't any point to it. The Voice would

say anything he thought they wanted to hear, just as Emily had pointed out. And Allen wanted to get away and think. He wanted to know who had called the club that evening and whom he had called. Had he spilled his guts to the first man who answered or had he thought he recognized the voice of the man who answered? That man had called someone; who was it?

Allen walked slowly out of the office and through the main room of the club. He didn't see Juanita, but he ran into her shadow, the little man he was always forgetting about but who never seemed to forget about him. He reached out and grabbed him, realizing suddenly that if the Shadow were there, Juanita should be also, and that if she weren't there, the Shadow shouldn't be. It was nothing to become excited about, but the way he felt now he would grab at any little irregularity.

"Where is Juanita?" he demanded. "Why aren't you with her?"

The Shadow showed his hate and he showed he wasn't afraid of Allen.

"You never mind about Juanita," he answered, and his voice shook with intensity. "You brought her enough trouble. You stay away from her and I'll take care of her."

Allen shook the man until his teeth rattled. "Where is she?"

The little man's mouth stayed closed.

Allen started to drag him up to the captain when Juanita came out of her dressing room. He lowered his hands and saw Juanita was waving at him, but he couldn't face her now. He ducked past the Shadow and went out of the club.

He had walked about half a block in the neon-lighted night before Captain Garcia caught up with him.

"May I walk with you?" the captain asked politely.

Allen knew what he really meant. They walked together, their shoulders almost touching, keeping step with each other, because they knew that in all of Monterrey they could trust only each other at this time. In a way it was funny. When the captain had slugged Allen, he had picked up a debt that tore him loose from his own country, from his own family, that had tied him to Allen as though Allen had suddenly become all the family he had ever had.

"Yet suppose it was the Blade," he said suddenly when they reached his car. At this stage, it would be an awful thing if it were the Blade.

"It wasn't the Blade, nor even José," Allen said wearily. "If anyone believed that it was—if either you or I or anyone else believed it, we could all sleep better."

“You understand me,” Captain Garcia said. “Of all of them, only you understand me.”

“Does it help?” Allen asked.

“It helps,” the captain said.

Allen got into the police car but the captain didn’t drive to the hotel. Instead he drove up Saddle Mountain, up over the service road above that, past the big closed gates that opened up to him when he flashed his red spot and sounded his siren. They drove across the path on top of the dam itself, and there the captain cut the motor and switched the lights off and they sat smoking, looking out over the vast valley Allen had built.

“It is a good work,” the captain said softly. “A man can be proud of it.”

Allen had been proud of it. Now the pride was gone. It was almost as if someone else had built the dam.

“A man needs something to be proud of,” the captain said, and Allen got what he was driving at. He remained silent, respecting the captain’s sorrow.

“I have to find the man who pushed that Raul,” the captain appealed to Allen. “You see that, Allen, do you now?”

Allen saw. The captain had to live with himself too. The difference between an American and a Mexican was only one of language after all.

“And your family?” he asked softly.

“Myself, Allen, myself. If I can face myself, I can face my family.”

They took it for granted that they knew where the trail would end.

It was difficult falling asleep that night.

The next morning, it was still early when the captain woke him, pounding on his door. This was becoming a love affair, thought Allen, letting him in and ordering coffee for both of them. The captain saved his life and then the captain put him to sleep and then the captain woke him up again.

“What’s new,” he grinned when the coffee was ordered.

“There is plenty new,” the captain answered angrily. “My brother has succeeded in having the case closed and me assigned to another.”

Allen thought it over slowly. An engineer moves slowly, especially after he has already made a batch of mistakes.

“You sure it was your brother?”

“It was my brother.”

Allen felt the anger in him mount to match the other’s. “How do you know it was your brother?”

“The orders came from the mayor to the Chief of Security and then from

the Chief of Security to me. Both men apologized to me—me, just a police captain—and both men told me it was for my own good and for the good of the reputation of my family, and I had to stand there and listen to that. So I told them, let me protect my own family my own way, and they patted me like I was a child and they said everything was all right and everything had been arranged. So I know it was my brother.”

And yet, Allen thought, the lawyer could be perfectly innocent of anything connected with Raul or the Blade or José. The lawyer might just realize that any investigation would hurt his reputation and his business and the business of the club. The lawyer might want Allen to do his own sleuthing and not involve the Garcia interests. Might, Allen thought, might.

Juanita called from downstairs. His room was becoming Monterrey’s social center, Allen thought, while he told the clerk to let her come on up.

She didn’t have much to say when she saw Captain Garcia. Pointedly, she sat and waited for the captain to take the hint and leave them alone. For a while, the captain sat stubbornly, and then he seemed to remember that no man can outwait a Mexican woman and that he wasn’t there officially anyway, so he dragged himself out of the chair and went away.

Allen faced Juanita.

“Did you bring your gun?” he joked after he had offered her some coffee and she had refused.

She stared at him for just an instant and then began to cry.

“Mickey,” she wailed, using the name he hadn’t heard for some time now, “José has not come back.”

It was real touching, he thought wryly. He wished someone would cry over him for a change. It was almost worth turning up missing just to be cried over.

“I’m afraid, Mickey,” she persisted.

“All right, you’re afraid.”

She didn’t understand his indifference.

“If you would stop lying to me,” he said. “If you hadn’t lied when the case was still open maybe it would have done some good. Maybe José would still be here. Maybe your lies killed your own brother.” He didn’t care how he hurt her now. He was damned sure José wasn’t dead.

“Mickey,” she said in her little girl’s voice. He thought of her on the dance floor and he almost laughed at the little, lost tone in her voice.

“Mickey,” she said again, “your car won’t be ready for a few days yet.

Come with me to Laredo and help me look for José.”

He stopped laughing. “Now we’re getting somewhere. You know about the Laredo run. Who is he running for?”

“I don’t know, Mickey. Maybe Tony, maybe Emily, maybe Garcia.”

“Garcia the captain?”

“The other Garcia, the fat little one.”

“Or maybe himself,” he suggested.

“Maybe himself,” she agreed.

He decided to press the new, contrite Juanita further. “And the phone call you overheard. Who was on the other end?”

“I don’t know, Mickey.” Mickey, she called him. It was like a cry for help from a dying person.

“Who pushed Raul?” he asked.

“I don’t know, Mickey. I swear it.”

She swore. She’d tell him what she wanted to when she had to tell him something and that was all she would do.

“You go to Laredo,” he said brutally. “You go find your handsome brother. I’m going to Guadalajara. I’m going to get drunk and stay drunk until they fix my car and then I’m going to Guadalajara.”

“I’m afraid for José,” she begged. “Maybe he knew more about Raul than I wanted to believe.”

That was some sort of an admission anyway. All he had to do was figure it out. All of a sudden he realized what she was telling him and his breath caught in his throat. She had just told him in Mexican double talk that she was afraid that it had been her own brother who had pushed Raul. And now that the plan had backfired she was afraid that José had run away and taken on the Laredo run and was hiding somewhere. She was offering him her brother if he would come with her.

It was too damned screwy to believe. Mexican girls didn’t sacrifice their brothers for anything, not for anything, not for life itself. It was just a bait she offered.

“What do you want to come with me?” she asked, when she saw she had failed again. “What can I offer you, Mickey?”

That was funny too. There wasn’t anything she could offer he hadn’t already had. And then, like a typical bargaining Mexican, she played her last card and, like a typical, bargaining Mexican, she made her best offer.

“How long will you be happy building your dams, knowing someone in

Monterrey ruined your good name and is laughing at you. You have nothing else to do today. Come with me to Laredo.”

He still didn’t like the idea, but it was all the idea there was.

“Okay,” he said.

He was just a fall guy for the dames, he thought, while he left a note at the desk for Captain Garcia.



## CHAPTER 9

TONY HAD brought the Blue Gate car for him to use, the car for Very Important Persons, and he left a note inviting Allen to drop in for a drink.

The handsome, duty-paid Cadillac almost filled the parking space in front of the Hotel Ancira and Juanita got in without a word, but Allen circled the big blue car as though it were a rattlesnake. He knew it was silly; he knew Tony wasn't going to write him a public note, leave it at the hotel desk and then give him a car that would blow up in Allen's face, but Allen couldn't get in and drive that car if his life depended on it. He felt as though his life did depend on not driving that car. If Tony and Juanita were in on this Laredo picnic together, a lot could happen to a car in one hundred and fifty odd, hard miles. He was glad to see that he had finally developed this caution.

He yanked Juanita out of the car.

"Too big," he joked. "I can't afford the gas."

He called a taxi driver from the taxi stand. To be doubly safe, he called the driver in the middle of the hack line and not the first one. It was one thing to go to Laredo; it was another to stick your head into a lion's mouth.

The driver seemed to appreciate the honor. He slammed into the sharp curves and nasty hills beyond Monterrey as though he were leading in the Pan-American road race and meant to stay in the lead. Less than four hours after they left Monterrey, they were at the border town of Nuevo Laredo, less than two hundred yards away from Laredo and the American line.

Allen told the cab driver to wait for them and the driver was happy to wait, but he wanted his money first. Allen, knowing about Americans jumping the border without paying, could understand that. He paid, but he shuddered as he watched the driver park the cab in front of a bar and waddle happily inside to wait for them. With that cab driver drunk, the cab would need wings to get over the Monterrey pass.

Allen turned to Juanita. The pleasant part of the day was over.

"What now?" he asked.

All she did was stare at him.

"I don't know, Mickey. Let's look for José."

"That's fine," he said. "Where the hell do you suggest I look first?"

It was something she had never thought of. She evidently thought all they had to do was come to Laredo and someone would tell her where José was or

what had happened to him. He sighed.

"I'm going to start off with the American customs guys," he told her. They must have heard about the dope run of Raul's.

She stared at the border fascinated. Just across the line was the big country, the one she had heard about and lived in the shadow of all her life. She wet her lips, watching, and watching her brought a sharp, sudden homesickness to Allen.

"Take me across with you, Allen," she begged. "Just for one American meal in a good hotel." Where the customers didn't spit on the floors and where garlic was a spice, not a main course.

"You're crazy," he said. "You've got no papers. You'd never get past the Mexican gate, let alone the American guards."

"Just one meal," she pleaded. "I could tell them I was born in the States. Then, after we ate, we could come back and they'd never know."

He wanted to talk to the customs men, and he wanted an American meal himself and he knew it was being done all the time. Men paid their women off with a fling in the United States.

He led her away from the bar.

For a few minutes they acted like tourists, shopping the stores, drifting closer and closer to the customs houses. Then he took a local cab and told the driver, in English, to take them back to God's country. The driver winced and Allen could almost feel the guy adding twenty pesos to the cab fare. The driver drove them to the Mexican gate.

"*Gringos*," he hissed at the inspector.

His hate showed and translated itself to the inspector. The inspector's eyes darkened and he waved them on and they moved across the bridge. They parked at the American gate.

"Hi," Allen greeted the American inspector happily. "It sure is great to be back."

The inspector grinned. He heard this all the time.

"How long you been in Mexico?" he asked.

"Four hours," Allen said easily. "And we've had it. They can take their country—" He broke off as though in deference to the inspector.

"Where were you born?" the inspector asked.

"Austin, Texas," he answered loudly, truthfully. "And that's just where I'm going. I was crazy to leave it."

"And where were you born, ma'am?" the inspector asked Juanita, almost

turning away from them.

“Monterrey, Mexico,” she said in perfect Spanish.

The taxi driver spun around as though he had been shot, and the inspector faced them again, white-faced.

“Your papers, ma’am,” he said in English, holding his hand out.

“I don’t have any,” she answered in Spanish. “He told me it would be all right and I could come with him to the hotel. He said I didn’t need any papers for that.”

“Park over there,” the inspector said sharply, waving them off to the customs house. He followed them carefully.

“What the hell do you think you’re pulling?” Allen asked her savagely.

“Go home, Allen,” she said just as savagely. “Go home and stay home.”

Just as he had known, Mexican girls didn’t sacrifice their brothers, not for anything, not even to save their own lives.

In the customs office, the senior inspector took the report.

“You should have known better, Mac,” he said to Allen. He pulled out a report form and Allen could see his reputation in the United States going to hell before his eyes.

“Smuggling a girl across the frontier isn’t a game,” the senior inspector said.

“Oh, to hell with it,” Allen said wearily.

“Don’t be mad at me, Mac,” the inspector said then. “I didn’t try to smuggle her over. You did.”

“What you do with me now?” Juanita asked in Spanish as though she had never heard of the English language.

“We’ll deport you, miss, just as soon as I’m finished.”

“I deport myself,” she announced. She got up and stalked out. The inspector moved to stop her.

“Let her go,” Allen said wearily. “She’s crazy.”

They stopped her anyway.

“Let’s have your name,” the inspector ordered.

Allen gave it, not giving a damn any more. The senior inspector wrote and then paused.

“The McCoy?” he asked.

“The great big hero who builds dams and smuggles little, innocent girls into the White Slave Traffic,” Allen answered bitterly. “And won’t that look great in the Sunday papers?”

“What’s going on here?” the senior inspector asked. He stopped writing. Juanita didn’t seem so sure of herself.

“She’s scared stiff about her brother,” Allen explained, still not caring if he never got back to Mexico. “She figured with me gone back to the States, in prison maybe for girl running, he would be safe.”

“She couldn’t be that dumb,” the inspector insisted.

“She’s not dumb,” Allen agreed. “She’s desperate.”

What did the inspector know about the Mexican Sack Game?

The inspector knew enough. He turned to Juanita. “Go on, ma’am, deport yourself,” he said.

She hesitated. She looked at Allen sprawled indifferently in front of the now friendly American customs officers and she looked at the bewildered taxi driver and slowly her eyes filled.

“I am sorry, Mickey,” she said at last. She said it in English.

She trudged out of the building and through the big, clean windows they watched her walk along with the other Mexicans to whom the United States of America was the dusty town of Laredo and to whom even that dusty town was beautiful.

“I’ve got my car outside,” the border guard said to Allen sympathetically when Juanita was out of sight. “I’m going off duty. Can I drop you anywhere?”

“Let’s eat,” Allen joked. He was surprised he could still joke.

The senior inspector stamped the report form “secret.” The incident was closed. Allen and the guard drove to the hotel and the guard watched while Allen ate.

“Did you know about this Raul Aguilar running dope?” Allen asked while he ate.

The guard nodded. “We had the report.”

“That was his widow,” Allen said then.

This time the guard didn’t nod. He pursed his lips, thinking.

“She thinks her brother took over the run from her dead husband?” he said then. This time, Allen nodded.

“What happened to the car Raul was driving?” Allen asked.

“The stripped one in the fields?” the guard asked. “It’s still out there waiting for an order from Mexico City so it can be moved. You know about those orders. They never come.”

Allen knew. It took six weeks to get a permit to chop a tree down even if

that tree blocked the progress of a whole dam. Unless someone greased the palm of someone else.

“Who was Raul running that dope for?”

The guard shrugged. “We don’t know yet,” he admitted.

“Christ,” Allen raged. “I might as well have stayed in Monterrey.” He stared at the guard. “Tell me something,” he begged. “Anything I can use. I’m stuck.”

The guard thought it over a long while, his eyes squinting. “Somebody here in Nuevo Laredo tipped off the Mexican Federals that Raul was running dope. Find that guy and you’ll be getting somewhere.”

That would be easy to do. All he had to do was walk into a bar and announce a reward for the guy who’d tipped off the Feds. They’d break their necks bringing the guy to him. Unless they broke his neck first.

“What about this side of the border?” Allen asked, still unwilling to give up. “They ran that dope into the States. Somebody must have been contacting them from here. Do you have any leads on that? How did that work?”

“That was the easy part of this,” the guard answered bitterly. “A couple of guys masquerading as tourists like you just did, take a taxi across the line, spend a few hours, then take another couple of taxis and come back loaded. In two, three days the stuff is in Los Angeles and Miami and Chicago. Once in a while we catch one of them, some inexperienced one who gives himself away.”

“What else can you tell me?” Allen asked.

“Do you want my personal opinion?”

Allen wanted facts but there weren’t any facts so it had to be opinions.

“Go to Guadalajara and build your dam and forget about Monterrey. You’re playing in a tough league. You’ll wind up with a knife in you.”

He almost had.

“If this guy José took over Raul’s run,” the guard went on thoughtfully, “and if he didn’t show up in Monterrey, he must still be here. Maybe they’ll try to pass that stuff tonight.”

José in Nuevo Laredo just across the river from him made sense. The thought tingled. Juanita had begged him to bring her to Laredo. Maybe she thought she could locate José, maybe she knew where he was. Maybe she thought she could talk him into abandoning the Laredo run, maybe she had some other plans, but José in Laredo would bring her there as surely as it had. It would also explain why she would want to get Allen out of her way. It

would clear up the stunt with the border guards. She might be with José right now, while Allen was sitting with the border guard.

The guard drove Allen back to the Mexican gate. Allen felt a twinge as he walked back into Mexico. It seemed like a pointless thing to do.

Just to tie up the loose ends first, he went back to the bar where he had left his taxi driver. The cab and the driver both were gone. Somebody must have told that driver something and Allen could imagine who it had been and what they had told him.

He took another cab and began a methodical cruise of Nuevo Laredo. He didn't miss a dirt street, he covered them all. He didn't know what he was looking for, but he looked until he'd raised dust on the last street and there was nothing left but hope. Hope, and the guard's warning that he was in a tough league.

It was four o'clock and the shadows were long but the heat lay heavily in the dust of Laredo. Like a condemned man taking his last meal, Allen led the driver into a bar for a cool drink. But a drink is only so long and must come to an end.

## CHAPTER 10

THEY DROVE out to the field where Raul's car waited for an order from Mexico City, an order that would never come.

Raul's wasn't the only stripped and gutted car in that field. That particular field must have been the graveyard for cars whose drivers suddenly found themselves in trouble. It was an ideal place, close to the border, inside the limits of Nuevo Laredo and yet deserted and unused, except for the ghost cars and the one lone shack at the far end of the field.

Allen walked slowly from car to car, but he couldn't recognize José's. A wrecked car without seats or wheels or motor or upholstery doesn't look like anything.

He went slowly back to the one Raul had abandoned. That one was easy to recognize. It still had the red seal of the Mexican government on it, announcing that it was a confiscated vehicle and was off limits to everybody.

Across the field, a figure appeared in the doorway of the lone shack and watched him. Allen wondered who else was watching.

He bent over the wreck and tried to look under the wheel-less vehicle, feeling around the bottom of the running boards. He couldn't even find the metal spring clips that had held the packets of dope against the frame. They had even taken that from the car.

It was then that he saw the shadow appear beside him and he heard the rustle in the dried grass. He threw himself through the open doorway of the car, bumping on the rusted steel frame, scrambling deeper inside. He didn't see the knife but he heard it hit the floorboard in front of him and he grabbed it as it skittered under the dashboard, straining on the seat frames until he could see out of the rear window.

He saw the Shadow standing behind him, mouth gaping wide open as if unable to believe he had missed his throw. He stood frozen for a split second as though he still expected to see Allen pitch forward to the dry grass; then he turned silently and bent low and ran.

From the road edge, the taxi driver came down to cut him off, and from the house across the field the figure advanced swiftly. The Shadow stayed low, almost doubled, heading at a long angle across the road, not even looking back, running as though he knew just where he wanted to go, just which one of the dirty streets would hide him. For a while they chased him,

three men closing in from three different angles, but he kept going until he made the road and then, still bent low, he disappeared around the corner of the first street at the far end of the field.

Allen watched him disappear, then bent and picked up the knife and, folding it, put it in his pocket. Thoughtfully he squinted at the lone house, far across the field. Then he overpaid the taxi driver and overthanked him and sent him back to town. He felt as though he had cut himself off from the world.

Slowly, deliberately, Allen began the long march across that field, on to the lone house, his skin crawling with the heat and the dust and his fear. The figure in the doorway of the shack watched him come, and when Allen was close, the man stepped courteously aside and invited him to enter. Allen entered.

He sat in the chair that was offered him, ignoring the fact that his back was now to the door. He studied the face of his host and could see nothing there that he could use. It was a blank, Mexican face, the smooth expressionless face of a man who had grown up among so much suffering and poverty and hopelessness that nothing touched him any more. Allen shivered slightly and his skin crawled over his body again, warning him to get out of there. He fought down the warning.

“You saw?” he asked politely.

“I saw,” the man answered, not showing surprise that Allen spoke Spanish.

“It happens many times nowadays,” Allen said.

“That is unfortunate,” the man sympathized. He spat on the dirt floor.

“A day or so ago a man drove that car into this field,” Allen went on deliberately. “This man was almost a relative of mine.”

He described Raul carefully to convince the man that he really had known Raul well. Down to the last hair of Raul’s moustache, he described him.

“I remember,” the man said when Allen was finished.

“During the night, came some other men and stripped that car,” Allen went on.

“That was not a good thing to do,” the man said, testing Allen.

Allen rose to the test. He was so sensitized he could almost smell a trap.

“It is only what this man, this near relative of mine, had wanted,” he said tonelessly.

The man widened his eyes.



“That is strange,” he commented.

“Now this man who was almost a relative of mine, is no more. When he returned to Monterrey, he died.” Allen took out his wallet and fished around in it until he found a fifty-dollar bill. His sweat stood out in big drops now as he forced himself to hold the wallet so the man could see how many more bills like that one there were. If he were killed in that house no one would ever find him. He could be buried in the field or taken somewhere else and the man could swear that Allen had never even come near the shack.

Allen pushed the crisp fifty-dollar bill across the bare wood table.

“You can see how important it is to me,” he said. “By this bill and by what happened in your field just now, you can tell.”

“That is clear,” the man said.

Allen sensed the figure that had suddenly appeared in the doorway behind him. A little more light went out of the almost dim room, a little sound he hardly heard, and he knew that now there were three of them. The hairs on his neck stood straight out from his body as he sat loosely in his chair. He felt the pressure of Shadow’s knife in his pocket but it was useless to him.

Slowly, very slowly, he turned in his chair until he saw the man in the doorway. This one was younger and he leaned against the doorway post with his loose jacket hanging open in front of him. One flap of the jacket hung across his stomach so Allen couldn’t see the man’s belt, but Allen didn’t have to see. The bulge was enough. There was a big automatic in the man’s belt.

For a short while, they looked at each other gravely. Then, just as slowly and evenly, Allen turned back until he faced the older man again.

“We can continue our talk?” Allen asked.

“We can continue,” the older man assured him. “This one is like a son to me.”

“This fifty-dollar American bill,” Allen went on, “big as it undoubtedly is, is nothing, is coca cola money compared to what I would pay for the names of the men who stripped that car.”

The man at the table seemed lost in thought. Finally, as though he had made up his mind, he stirred.

“It is very easy to do what you want,” he said.

Allen held his breath, bracing himself for the smash of a bullet at him.

“It was I, *señor*, who stripped that car,” the man at the table said. “And for that information, I have not earned the money.” He shoved the bill back across the table to Allen, but Allen let it sit. He didn’t move to touch it.

“The answer you give me I do not doubt,” he said then. “But it is not the answer I seek.”

“Nevertheless, it is the truth,” the man insisted.

“That, too, I do not doubt,” Allen went on. “It is still not the answer I seek.”

He stopped, considering the man in front of him. They waited, confused.

Allen had looked all over Nuevo Laredo for José’s car but had not been able to find it. It had to be in this field.

“Yesterday,” he started out again. “Another man came here in another car. He, too, was a friend of mine. Is his car on this field too? Stripped?”

“It is here,” the older man said softly.

That information would do him no good. Not if he couldn’t get out of that shack.

“And you stripped that one, too?”

“Yes, *señor*. ”

If he understood this man, Allen knew he would never leave the shack alive. They couldn’t let him go now.

“Perhaps we talk of two different things,” he said then. He chose each word carefully; his life depended on it. “Perhaps I should not talk of stripping the car. You have to live and you take what is sent you. My interest is in the men who came to this car and took no more than one, or at most two, small packages away with them. These packages were so small they could easily fit into a man’s coat pocket. I do not talk of the wheels of a car, or motors, or window glass or things like that.”

The man’s eyes cleared then and he looked up at the one in the doorway. Allen knew what they were deciding—he was betting his life on the honesty of two Mexicans who were admitted thieves. He was betting they stole only when they had to and hated dope as much as he did.

“I saw them,” the man said finally. Allen breathed again. “I did not see clearly, for I have no big lights, and besides I was paid by the drivers of the cars to leave them there, not to watch what happened to them.”

“In the States, we call that a parking fee,” Allen said trying to keep the talk normal.

“It is a good name,” the man said. “These men you talk of—they came and moved around the car and then they left. They had cars of their own.”

“And you did not see them?”

“Truthfully, I did not,” the man said. He thought a while and then he

smiled and reached over the table and took the bill. Allen tightened again.

"I have earned this," the man said. "I saw the license plates of the first car, although I did not recognize the men."

"From Laredo?" Allen asked almost gasping out the words.

"No, *señor*. From Laredo, I would have recognized them."

"From the United States?" Allen asked then, remembering what the border guard had told him.

Again the man shook his head. "From Monterrey," he said.

"And the car itself?" Allen pressed. "That, too, you saw as well as the license plates?"

"A big car, *señor*. It cost much money."

"Its color was blue and its make was Cadillac," Allen said, remembering the Blue Gate official greeting car.

"That was the first one," the man agreed.

Tony, Allen thought. The son of a bitch, Tony. But then the thought died. Tony, sure, or Garcia, or José or the Shadow, or Juanita or even the bartender or shoeshine boy. Everybody had access to that car; that car was always in use.

He took out another fifty.

"You have been of great help," he said.

The man took the bill readily. "I meant to be," he said. "Everyone has heard of this redheaded engineer, the *gringo* who builds our dams for us and who learned our language and who doesn't hate Mexicans. The one who loves our girls a little too well," he finished slyly.

They had known him all along. For the first time Allen knew he was leaving that shack alive.

The man poured drinks and after a polite interval Allen left the house. He walked back across the field, past Raul's car and out to the highway. He went back to Nuevo Laredo. A big blue Cadillac had come and somehow it tied up with Raul's being pushed under his Jaguar. But how?

## CHAPTER 11

HE TRUDGED the dusty Mexican streets of Nuevo Laredo again, looking, peering inside the houses he passed, and at every cantina he opened the swinging doors and walked inside and sat at the bar and drank and listened to the talk and asked for Juanita or José or the Shadow. Nobody talked. They sold him tequila, they gave him conversation and they gave him sympathy, believing that Juanita must be some local girl he was chasing and had lost, but nobody told him what he wanted to hear.

Slowly the tequila haze mounted in him and a voice warned him not to push his luck too far, but he paid no attention. From bar to bar and from one shadowed house to the next he went, asking his questions, flashing his money recklessly, realizing he was just begging some lean and hungry character to stick a knife into his ribs for that bankroll, but he kept going and he kept looking.

He found himself sitting in one of these small cantinas finally, unable to go on. He tried to fight the tequila fumes that beat against his skull in waves.

There wasn't any conversation in this place; that had died when he had entered. He stared at the oily white liquid in front of him and his stomach gagged. The man behind the bar watched silently while Allen peeled some money from the wad in his wallet. It was funny how carefully the bartender made the correct change and how seriously and graciously he accepted his tip. His eyes had never left that wallet, not even when Allen put it back into his pocket.

Allen made his offer and his request for conversation again, wondering why no one had jumped him yet or had tried to lead him into some dark alley. His lucky star must be watching him, he thought, while the haze inside him became thicker and his head felt as though it would split.

"You've had enough, now, *señor*," a voice beside him said, and Allen whirled and grabbed the man's knife hand, recognizing the voice of the Shadow. Allen pinned the hand to the bar and forced the Shadow's back against the hard, nicked wood.

The Shadow made no move to free himself.

"You forget, *señor*," he said finally. "I came to you of my own free will. You do not have to hold me this way. I have followed you, protecting you, for hours. You show too much money."

Allen had found the lucky star that had been watching over him, protecting him. His skin crawled between his shoulders when he remembered himself walking the streets with the Shadow always within knife-throwing distance.

Just as he had seen Captain Garcia do, Allen chopped down at the face before him. The little man tried to duck away but he was late and the blow, slow and unsteady, landed on the side of his head, almost throwing him from the bar stool to the ground. Unblinking, he continued to sit, still pinned, still motionless, waiting for the next blow.

He made no attempt to free himself or even to defend himself and his attitude cut through the tequila. Feeling foolish, Allen let him go, knowing that the Shadow must have seen Juanita.

Finally the Shadow sensed that Allen had sufficiently recovered from his shock and from the stupor he had drunken himself into.

"I made a bad mistake," he said. "I missed a knife throw today for the first time in my life and I was very unhappy, but now I am glad I missed. If I had hit you, it would have caused much pain to many people."

"And to me," Allen said. That crack warned him that he was not yet entirely sober.

The Shadow allowed a small smile to play on his face. It was the first time Allen had seen that face crack with an expression of emotion.

"So you saw Juanita after you ran from the field," Allen said. "She told you you were knifing the wrong man and you came to apologize. You followed me all over town until I was drunk and it was safe for you to apologize."

The little man nodded. "I came with more than an apology," he said. "I came to let you beat me. I should not have thrown the knife."

That cleared Allen's head fast.

"Why did you try to kill me?" he asked. "What was the mistake you made?"

"I saw you cross the border with Juanita. I thought you were having Juanita arrested by the American authorities. I saw them take you inside the building and I thought I would never see her again. I couldn't get across the border to come after you and I almost went crazy. Maybe I did go crazy. Then after a long while I saw you come back to the bridge and then I followed you."

"Where is José?" Allen asked.

“He is not here. All day I searched and he is not here.”

Something clicked in Allen’s memory then. He grabbed the Shadow again.

“You lied to me,” he said. He saw the flicker come over the man’s face and then disappear.

“How did you know I was taking Juanita to Laredo? You couldn’t have followed us from Monterrey because we drove too fast, and besides, I would have seen you on the highway.”

“I did not lie,” the Shadow answered. “Juanita told me you were taking her.”

“When did she tell you that?”

“Before she went to your room at the hotel. She didn’t want me to follow her and she told me you were taking her here. I was in Laredo when you arrived.”

Women, Allen thought angrily. She had planned the whole trip, even down to the border incident and had made it all come out so naturally, he had never suspected.

It just wasn’t any good, Allen thought wearily. These people lied so much, it wasn’t clear to them when they lied and when they told the truth. For all he knew, José might be holed up in a back room, right in this same cantina, and Allen would never find out unless they wanted him to find out. Laredo was a dead-end trail for him. The only thing the Shadow had said that Allen knew was true was that he was sorry he had thrown that knife. Juanita would never have forgiven him if he had hit Allen.

“You want a ride back to Monterrey?” he asked. He didn’t think this trap would work either; it wasn’t that clever.

“Thank you. I have a ride.”

“With Juanita?”

“You still have no belief in me,” the Shadow said sadly. “I will ride with you to prove Juanita is not here.”

That would prove a lot, Allen thought sarcastically.

He left the cantina and they hunted for a cab to take them to Monterrey. They were quiet on the way back to where this whole thing had started. The cab rolled and bounced heavily on the rutted, twisting road, and at first Allen thought he would be sick, but he fought the feeling down. Being sick in front of the Shadow was almost like being sick in front of Juanita.

They reached the first customs check point where a guard in a booth was

supposed to stop all American cars and make sure they were properly registered into Mexico. It was really a check on the honesty of the Mexican border guards, Allen knew. If one of them at the border accepted a bribe and let some contraband merchandise, or an unregistered car through, this guard was supposed to catch it.

“Do you know the dancer Juanita from Monterrey?” he asked the guard. Beside him, the Shadow stiffened suddenly.

“I have never been to Monterrey, *señor*,” the guard said politely, handing Allen his passport.

“That doesn’t matter,” Allen said. “This dancer’s picture is on all the big billboards they paste up on Laredo walls for the American tourists to see. She is the most beautiful dancer in Mexico.”

“Her picture I have seen.”

“Did she pass through here in the last several hours?” Allen asked.

“I did not see her.”

“You would have noticed and remembered if she had?” Allen asked again.

“That would be natural, *señor*. Her, I would have noticed and remembered. She did not pass.” He waved them on again.

They drove on in silence. There was no sound except for the hum of the motor and the steady drumming of the tires.

“You lied to me again,” Allen said. “Juanita is in Laredo. She must have found José.”

There was no answer, no word to confirm or deny.

Allen wondered what difference it made. In a short while, he would stop batting his head against this stone wall and he would go to Guadalajara. They would all be rid of him then, and he would be rid of them all. There would be an unpleasant memory but it wasn’t worth a man’s life.

In Monterrey, there was a telegram and some mail for him at the hotel. The telegram informed him that the Secretary of Public Works of Guadalajara had found that a delay in the building of the dam could not be tolerated at this time and that, therefore, the good people of Guadalajara panted and prayed for his rapid appearance there so that the essential work of dam building could go forward, so would he please come at once.

That meant that Captain Garcia had officially absolved him of all responsibility in the death of Raul Aguilar. The case was really closed now.

The two letters told Allen how that had been accomplished. One was a

copy of a letter from the governor of the state to the mayor of Guadalajara and the other was a copy of a letter from the Chief of Security of Monterrey to the mayor of Guadalajara. Allen had been the innocent and undeserving victim of a nefarious scheme, the letters both said. This diabolical scheme had been boldly and tragically pushed by a desperado known only as the Blade, who had killed Raul Aguilar. But now the Blade also lay dead and justice was served, and the unjustly tarnished reputation of Allen McCoy, savior of Monterrey, should be restored to its rightfully gleaming splendor.

The tequila he had consumed in Laredo and these two letters were enough to make Allen really sick. All the ends were neatly tied now, and someone was pushing him out of the case as fast as a man can be pushed, and not doing it subtly either.

Allen called Captain Garcia's house and was told that the captain was too busy to come to the phone but could see him in the police office the next day if Allen wished. Allen was beyond caring what they told him. He went out to the captain's home and forced his way past the maid.

Captain Garcia couldn't throw Allen out of his home, but he didn't invite him inside, nor did he offer Allen a drink or even a chair. It was the prime insult and the captain must know that Allen realized it. The captain's face was impassive, masked. He just stood blankly and waited.

"Juanita's shadow tried to knife me today," Allen started out.

"I will have him arrested in the morning," the captain answered without any change of expression. "If you call the police station, they will order his arrest tonight and you won't have to wait until tomorrow."

"I'm not pressing charges," Allen said. "Besides, it happened in Laredo, not here in Monterrey."

The captain's expression didn't change. "The Laredo officers are just as lax in protecting you as the Monterrey police were," he said stiffly. "Perhaps the Guadalajara police will do better."

"Perhaps," Allen said, studying the captain's face.

The captain's eyes weren't even fixed on Allen. They stared stonily at the wall behind Allen's head.

"You couldn't send those damned telegrams fast enough," Allen burst out finally. "You just couldn't get me out of Monterrey fast enough."

"The case is closed," the captain said stiffly. "There is nothing to wait for."

"You know damned well it wasn't the Blade," Allen argued.



“The case is closed,” the captain repeated. “It was the Blade.”

“Man, what are you doing?” Allen said. “You have a whole life to live with yourself, remembering this, remembering your fat little brother laughing at you, making sport of everything you believe in.”

There wasn’t any answer to that. There couldn’t be, Allen knew. If you’re a Mexican you don’t spill your hate out in front of a foreigner.

“And the Voice?” Allen asked softly. “You were going to question him last night. You were my friend last night.” Only the lips moved in the captain’s face, the lips and the few cheek muscles he needed for speech.

“He will be jailed for attempted murder. The case is closed.”

He turned away from Allen but Allen caught him and spun him back.

“I was just a slightly drunken driver,” he reminded the captain. “But some man turned me into a killer. I would never have hit a man otherwise—I wasn’t that drunk. That is enough reason for me to do what I’ve done and to continue doing it. How can you stop now? You are a captain of police.”

“The Blade pushed Raul Aguilar,” Captain Garcia said stiffly. “And now the Blade is dead. The case is closed, *señor*. And if you will excuse me, I am very tired.”

Tired, thought Allen, tired of writing telegrams, tired of thinking about his brother, tired of having Allen at his side like a thorn, tired of the career he had chosen. That kind of tiredness didn’t go away with a night’s rest. Sometimes it never went away.

Allen walked out of the house and over to his taxi.

## CHAPTER 12

IT WAS A damned fool thing to do, but he had the driver take him out to the Villa de Guadalupe. With everyone else nailing down the cover on the case so the smell wouldn't escape, he might as well drive a few nails himself.

He didn't know exactly what he was going for, and before he could figure it out, the cab had passed the bar where they had given him directions to the street called Fifth of May and where Emily had been found trying to get help for him.

He had the driver back up to the cantina. Another damned bar in his life wouldn't make any difference now.

As soon as he entered, he realized they knew him there. They remembered him. All the conversation died as though he had cut it off himself. The men watched him and the owner of the bar came swiftly, worry all over his face, as though he expected trouble.

"Can we talk?" asked Allen.

The bartender stared at the other men and then shrugged and led Allen to the end of the bar, close up against a wall. It was all a formality anyway. They would know what was being said. Allen settled himself comfortably against the wall, thanked the man for the tequila that had been offered.

"Last night," he said, not believing it had happened only one night ago, "there came a woman, the one they call the most beautiful woman in Monterrey."

"Your wife, perhaps?"

"No, not my wife."

"She is going to become your wife?"

"Nor that, either," Allen said.

The others let out a slow, satisfied sigh. At least he hadn't come to avenge her. That was what they had feared when they had seen him come through the swinging doors.

"She asked for help for me," Allen reminded the man. "But no help came. Why?"

"That very beautiful woman," the man said. "*Señor*, she came in here and offered money and her body and anything else we wanted. We thought she was crazy or drunk. You would have thought that too."

"Yet I was in trouble. And she did call the police. From that phone, there

on your wall, she called them,” Allen said pointing.

The bar owner spat on the floor.

“She did all of that,” he agreed. “And yet we thought her drunk or crazy. Coming in here, offering herself.”

Allen came to the point. “She speaks no Spanish. How could she have asked you for help?”

“That much of her English we understood. That and her gestures.”

Allen could imagine the gestures Emily would have used. “And what did she say to the police on the phone?” he asked.

“That we couldn’t tell. Her English sputtered too fast for our poor command.”

“But she called them?”

“She called them,” the man admitted bitterly. “And that was why we paid no attention to what she said later. We could not believe you were out in that field being tortured. For, *señor*, she called the Monterrey police. She didn’t call the Guadalupe police who are right here, only three blocks away. We pointed it out to her and she said that our police are not honest ones like the Monterrey police. All the way from Monterrey, she called them and yet she said you were dying and we should come to help you. So we figured either she was lying or she was drunk. Or else—”

“Or else what?” Allen urged, knowing what was coming next.

“Or else she wanted the police to come, but she wanted you to die first.”

He turned to the others. They had long since dropped their pretense of not listening. They were nodding violently in agreement with the bar owner.

“That was the way it appeared to you and the others?”

“That was exactly the way, *señor*. I am sorry.”

Allen thanked them and went out to the waiting cab.

That was the way it appeared to Allen too. Only Emily could have botched it up—she had practically kept the help from reaching him. It was just one thing more he would carry away from Monterrey.

The bar owner had come out to the door to watch him drive away. It was as though he wanted to assure himself that Allen was finally going out of his life.

Allen called him over.

“Now that the others cannot hear,” Allen said, “there is one thing more. I would pay much money to know who it was who escaped last night. The one they called the Blade is dead, and another man was captured, but one more or

two more escaped.”

The bartender looked back at the doors of his cantina and then faced Allen again.

“That, *señor*, I cannot tell you.”

Either because he didn’t know, or because he didn’t dare, Allen thought. It was more Mexican double talk.

“Still, I would pay much,” he said again.

“I would like very much to earn the money, *señor*, believe me, but if you did ask those who escaped they would merely tell you that the one who was captured hired them, and the man who is dead hired the one you captured. More than that you would never hear.”

It was another nail in the cover. Captain Garcia must have worked like a beaver all day. And everybody seemed to know something or a piece of something, but nobody told him what they knew, so the pieces couldn’t be fitted together.

It all began, he remembered, when the band played *Guadalajara*. It was like a symbol. Now everyone was playing *Guadalajara* for him, that and *Get Out of Town*. And the band had played *Guadalajara* badly, he remembered; even through the tequila he had noticed that.

Allen got rid of the bar owner in a hurry. There weren’t many strolling players in Monterrey and only a few of these Mariachi bands would have as many as eight players. He and the cabbie drove back to Monterrey and began to look for an eight-piece band that played *Guadalajara* badly.

They cruised the main streets, stopping at each band they passed and then going on as soon as they saw they had the wrong one. They drove through the side streets and the big plazas and then the small squares and still they couldn’t find the band. It was close to midnight when Allen came back to the big central plaza, dismissed the cab and sat on a bench near the Municipal Building. He waited. Sooner or later, every one of the bands would roam that square looking for a stray drunk or a sentimental American tourist who would hire music for the romance of it.

Allen waited an hour. Then the band he was waiting for wove unsteadily into the square. They must have been playing a wedding, Allen thought; they were high. They looked over their competition and they sized up the slim pickings left in the square and then they began to work the benches trying to get someone to hire them. Allen let them drift until they reached him. The band leader recognized Allen and grinned at him.

“You buy a song?” he asked. “We play *Guadalajara*.”

“Play,” Allen ordered sleepily. He didn’t feel sleepy, he had to force himself to sit still while they butchered the song. He forced himself not to move until the last squeak on the last fiddle died away and it was quiet again.

“How much?” he asked.

“Ten pesos,” the leader said. The price was five.

“I’ll give you a hundred,” Allen said suddenly, not acting sleepy any more.

That rocked them. They crowded around him waiting, wondering if he wanted them to play the same song nine more times. Some drunken tourists did that. But the leader of the band didn’t do anything. He waited. He knew Allen.

“When I left the blonde woman’s house that night, what happened?” he asked.

He didn’t have to tell the band leader which blonde, or which house, or which night. The leader knew.

The man kept his eyes on the hundred pesos while he weighed the worth of what he had to tell Allen and while he weighed the danger of telling it.

“She came out and drove away.”

“She has no car,” Allen pointed out. “Was it a taxi she called?”

“No, it was the car of the man who owns the Blue Gate.”

“The *gringo*?”

“The other one, the attorney.” The leader broke off suddenly. He had evidently remembered how powerful that attorney was, and remembered also the feverish activity of the attorney’s police brother in closing the case that day.

Allen gave up the bill.

“I spoke too much perhaps?” the leader said worriedly.

“You told me nothing,” Allen answered. “I am just a sentimental American wanting some memories of Monterrey before I leave.”

The leader looked relieved.

“Musicians should play, not talk,” he said. He hit his fiddle sharply and they started on *Guadalajara* again. That would be for the benefit of anyone who had been watching them, Allen knew, so he forced himself to listen to the song again. They still played it badly; they hadn’t improved any since he had heard them in front of Emily’s house.

The show at the Blue Gate was under way when he got there but it was

going on without Juanita. The place was becoming real lonely, he thought, counting off the missing people: Raul, the Blade, José, the Shadow, and now Juanita. It was becoming a real ghost town.

The tables weren't deserted though, they were still jammed. The ringside table of the little fat counsel was the most jammed table of them all. He was giving some sort of party. The table was loaded with bottles of the best stuff, and the invited guests couldn't all fit around the one lone table, they spilled over onto the dance floor and the tables around the counselor. Near the lawyer sat Emily and she was wearing an evening gown that was designed to show the world what a bargain the lawyer was getting and what a hell of a man he was if he could hold a woman like her.

Emily waved for him to come over, but he ignored her and went looking for Tony. He found Tony in the office, sorting a mess of papers.

"They're drinking up your profits," Allen told him, sitting down.

Tony didn't feel like joking for once.

"They're drinking up their own profits," he said. "I'm out. The fat son of a bitch and his brother came back today and practically booted me out of here. Then the fat slob made an offer to buy me out. He made a damned good offer considering what my original investment was, but it's chicken feed compared to what this dump is worth. Now he's celebrating his big business deal."

"I thought you were going to fight," Allen reminded him.

"I am fighting. I've got the second best lawyer in Mexico. I'm fighting the whole damned police force and that fat little bastard and that sweet little Emily and the American consul too. I'm fighting all around, all right, so it will take them thirty-six hours to get me out of here instead of twelve. How long did they give you?"

"About the same thirty-six hours," Allen admitted.

"The bastards," Tony grated. He wasn't the same happy boy any more. He didn't like getting booted either.

"What a country," Allen mimicked him. "With money you can do anything."

"Yeah," Tony admitted. "Only that guy has more money than I'll ever see."

"Do you have to go?" Allen asked.

"Not until they lift my passport. I can fight the license deal in court, but if they take up my passport, I'm through."

“They’ll do that, too,” Allen commented.

Tony thought it over.

“It’s a funny thing, Allen,” he said. “But they’ve got a point and I can see it. You’re coming out of this all right even though you took a hell of a beating for a while. I’m getting out with a lot more than I came in. Garcia split the shares of the Blade and José between us and paid me for that too. Okay. So they say what the hell are we squawking about. And there’s no way for an American to tell them why it hurts.”

It hurt all right.

“Did you know Emily was in this all the way?” Allen asked then.

“All I ever heard were rumors. I never got hold of a single definite thing.”

“She was in it. She practically controlled that dope run of Raul’s,” Allen went on. “Every step of it.”

“You know that?” Tony asked, sitting up excited. “You’ve got the facts on that?”

“Not court facts. I know it though.”

“That’s great,” Tony said. “Now I can hold them off for forty-eight hours instead of thirty-six if I yell loud enough.” The office became like a morgue. They were burying a lot more than papers there. Allen got up to leave.

“Wait for me,” Tony said. “We’ll have a drink on it. A drink on that fat little bastard downstairs.”

Allen wandered over to the lawyer’s table. Emily jumped up and ran over to meet him.

“Allen,” she said quietly and swiftly so that the others couldn’t hear, “Take me with you. Please Allen, it’s the last time I’ll ask you. Get me away from here.”

He stood away from her, smiling, looking down at her low-cut dress.

“I want to thank you for calling the cops last night,” he said. “I was going to thank you before, but you were too drunk.”

She stared at him, not understanding what he was driving at.

He wanted to swing at her as hard as he could, but he knew he wouldn’t. Just as he knew he wouldn’t get anything out of staying here. He turned on his heel, Emily watching him until he reached the front doors, and then Garcia called her and she went slowly back to the table. And Allen went out into the night again.

## CHAPTER 13

HE DIDN'T take a taxi this time. He walked. He walked every street between the night club and the hotel because he wanted to see everything. It was like saying good-bye. Monterrey was a place that had given him the best times of his life and the best work of his life and then, with a single turn of a car wheel, had taken it all away again.

He slept late the next morning. Now that there was nothing to get up for, his tired body took over and tried to catch up with the beatings and the scares he had received and the hours of sleep he had lost. Once, the room clerk sent a maid up to tiptoe into his room and make sure that he was still alive. Allen opened his eyes and winked at her and then turned over and slept again.

It was almost noon when the phone woke him. He answered it sleepily and listened dazed to the voice of José, urgent now, asking him to come quickly. Juanita had been hurt, and the way José's voice cracked and lost its smoothness she must have been hurt badly, in a peculiarly Mexican way of being hurt. All his hours of sleep didn't help Allen now; his body hurt again all at once, protesting against being dragged back into a Mexican whirlpool of intrigue and murder.

José was real careful. He gave Allen the name of the hospital and the room number and nothing else. And Allen had finally learned to be just as careful. He dressed quickly and then called the hospital. He asked for Juanita de Aguilar's room. They didn't have any Juanita de Aguilar. He described her and José carefully and then they remembered they did have such a patient but with another name. José was being careful too. The hurt Juanita had received couldn't have been just an accident.

It hadn't been an accident. Her left cheek was bandaged where the bone had been crushed and José pulled the sheet down from her body and showed where the doctors had bandaged her ribs. José wasn't the dandy any more, not when he showed that to Allen. His face was the same frozen mask that the Mexican Indians wore for faces, his eyes the same glowing pools that frightened so many Americans.

Allen looked at the unconscious, sheathed, clawed-up body of Juanita and he remembered her as she had looked when she stamped her fury out on a dance floor. He felt sick. All of this could have been prevented if only he had moved faster and more carefully and more surely. He had been searching for



José too, but his search had ended in a bar with the Shadow at his side when the Shadow should have been at her side. Her search had ended in an alley with a man who had found her before she had found José.

“It happened in Laredo?” he asked.

“In Laredo.” José shivered as though it were happening again right now. “Right near where I was hiding like an old woman. She knew where I was and was coming for me when it happened.”

Something flashed a warning signal to Allen.

“How did you find out then?” he asked, almost forgetting Juanita.

“He found her,” José answered, pointing at the head of the bed. “Then he called me.”

Allen hadn’t seen the figure crouching at the head of the bed against the wall. Now he went around and stooped and stared down at the Shadow. Exhaustion had finally put the little man out and he slept where he sat, one hand reaching up to the pillow, so he could feel any action of Juanita’s. Even while he slept he must have been reliving that awful beating. His eyes were wet and tears forced themselves from the closed eyelashes.

The crazy little bastard must have gone right back to Laredo as soon as Allen had dumped him in Monterrey.

Allen turned slowly and tiptoed back to José.

“He found her?” he asked.

“He must have been right behind her when it happened,” José answered. “Only a few seconds behind her. She screamed just once and he came swiftly but not swiftly enough.”

“And the man who did this to her?” Allen asked.

“The Shadow found him too.”

Allen’s skin tightened. Only the need of getting her to a doctor could have made the Shadow’s death stroke a fast one. Only the need for that had saved Juanita’s attacker from being sliced slowly into strips like the reins of a horse.

“Does that man have anything to do with me?” Allen asked next.

He didn’t think José would tell him anything about that man.

“Nothing,” José answered. “It was some *bracero* from the Villa de Guadalupe.”

From Villa de Guadalupe, Allen thought, holding his breath.

“He must have been one of the men mixed up with Raul,” José continued.

Allen let his breath out again. He looked back at the bed. The Shadow

was awake, watching him.

Allen knew what had happened but he couldn't tell it to these two grief-demented men. They'd have gone to work on him if he had.

Juanita had been searching for her brother all right, but she had been seen walking with Allen first. She had even been seen going with him into the American customs office and then coming out again, unmolested. Anybody watching her would have been sure that she was friendly with the customs. So the closer she came to José, the closer she rubbed up against the others, and the others knew that someone had reported Raul and who could better report Raul than his own wife? And they knew that she could report them too.

Even the Shadow had misunderstood the incident with the border guards; these others must have been besides themselves with fear. One of them had struck back at her. Desperately and silently he had struck, but not fast enough. The Shadow had come back to watch over her.

All she had done was search for her brother, but she had searched with Allen. Walking with Allen had become a crime, a crime punishable by death.

Juanita stirred and moaned, and the three men turned towards her. She opened her eyes and looked up at them and when she recognized Allen, she screamed.

"Allen!" she shrieked, ignoring the pain that shot through her cheek. "Hurry!" She fainted.

Allen hurried. His pulse pounded when he reached her and bent over her, afraid to touch her, afraid to feel her pulse. A nurse came in, alarmed by the sudden scream. She brushed Allen away, made a swift examination, and then straightened up again.

"Everything is all right," she told them. "She just came out of the morphine for a while. Now she's under again." At the door she turned. "Keep your voices down, you pigs," she said savagely.

They stared after her. What the hell had she thought they were doing, telling each other dirty jokes?

Allen raced out after the nurse. "How is she?"

"Go see the doctor."

"Please," he begged. Once more and he would have strangled her.

She looked at him, saw the strain in his face and softened.

"Medically, she's all right. If she hadn't been, they wouldn't have let her out of the Laredo hospital. But the pain is bad." She hesitated.

"There is more?" he asked.

"The face is disfigured. You saw."

"I saw."

"Her body is made of steel," the nurse said softly. "A real dancer's body. Even the blows on the ribs couldn't hurt that body much. But the face was softer."

Allen nodded thanks and he went back into the room.

"I'm sending her to Mexico City for plastic surgery," José announced as though he were defending himself. Allen suddenly realized that José was blaming himself. He knew nothing about the real reasons for her beating.

"That will be expensive," he pointed out. "Let me pay for her surgery."

"Thank you," José declined. "This debt is mine. I'll get a job as *bracero* in the States."

Allen had to fight the sudden grin that wanted to break out on his face. He had a swift picture of the dandy José doing stoop labor in the fields and sending twenty dollars a week to Mexico City to cover a surgery bill that would run into thousands.

"You won't have to do that," he reminded José. "Counselor Garcia will pay well for your share of the Blue Gate."

Allen saw the sudden relief in José's eyes.

"I swear to you, Allen," José said, "she will never dance again. Not for money, not unless it is in a theater with printed programs."

Allen saw that José was sufficiently softened and that now was his chance.

"Why did you run away, José?" he asked. Beside him, the Shadow grew alert again.

"I was afraid," José answered simply.

"What of?" Allen asked.

The Shadow signalled frantically to José not to answer. José was quiet.

"All right, then, I'll tell you," Allen said. He spoke close to José's ear, keeping his voice down.

"This once, I'll say it and then, never again," he promised. "You were afraid, like you said, but not for yourself. For yourself, you have no fear of anything. You were afraid for Juanita. You thought Juanita had killed Raul and then had the Shadow push him under my car. You were afraid I would never stop, looking until I found that out and so you ran away, hoping we would think you had killed Raul and had run away in panic because the investigation had come too close to you."

José's face showed Allen how right he had been.

"That I will never say again," Allen promised. "And this, too, I will never say again. Juanita tricked me into taking her to Laredo for the same reason. She thought you had killed Raul and she thought she could trick me into leaving Mexico and then the investigation would be closed for good. You and she would be able to leave Monterrey and live in safety somewhere else. That much she was doing for you."

Josh's face wrinkled as he fought for self-control. The masklike expression sagged and then broke.

"And she didn't kill Raul?" he gasped incredulously.

Allen wished he were as sure as he sounded. "Neither she, nor the Shadow nor you."

"Then who?"

"Who knows?" Allen said, echoing the famous Mexican buck-passing phrase.

But he was sure he knew.

When he finally left the hospital, the two men made no attempt to follow him. They would stay in that room with her until she left it. Allen had often seen that before. Mexicans didn't abandon their sick ones to strangers in white uniforms. Mexicans kept personal guard over the ones they loved.

He went back to the hotel and ordered flowers for Juanita. It wasn't just a gesture of sympathy for a sick person. It was a personal good-bye that only she and he would know about. It was like a secret between them.

Even if she had killed Raul, he wouldn't have felt the bitterness and resentment he felt now. It would make sense if it had been Juanita; it would fit the personality of a girl who had fought her way up from a poverty no American could appreciate and who then longed for more, for an American husband and a home in the United States. It would have been a screwy way to get what she wanted, but it would have been the only way she knew.

But he was sure it hadn't been Juanita.

Captain Garcia dropped in to say good-bye. That was his announced reason, but Allen was sure the real reason was to convince himself that Allen was leaving Monterrey.

"They asked me downstairs to tell you that your car is ready," he said, glad of some way to start the conversation.

The workmen had smoothed the Jag until no one could tell where the bullets had hit. The car was like he was, Allen thought; the scars were hidden

where they wouldn't show. Anyway, the Jag was ready to leave Monterrey and he was too.

"I thought you would like to know that the two children are home with their grandmother. They have no father."

"In Montemorelos?" Allen asked quietly.

The captain chuckled. "You are a sharp one," he said admiringly. "She came from a village near-by. You figured that out."

"The whole story couldn't be a lie," Allen said, thinking of something else. He was more interested in this sudden change of attitude on the part of the captain; there had to be a reason.

"If there hadn't been some truth to the story," he went on, "there would have been a report of missing children, and maybe even a missing mother. That woman had to be the real mother and she had to come from near Montemorelos to speak the dialect. How did she get papers with a false name on them?"

"You ask that question in Mexico?" the captain said. "Forged papers are cheaper than genuine ones here and easier to procure."

A sudden thought hit Allen. "How do you know the kids are safe? Maybe somebody else has them by now."

The captain's smile faded. His face was bleak as he realized again what Allen thought of him.

"I am not that bad a man, *señor*," he said. "I just called Montemorelos and had a policeman go and see for himself and then call me back. There are no phones in that village but I had the police do that. The children are there and this time the grandmother is real and all the villagers are watching those children,"

Just like in a movie. All the pieces were fitting into place neatly and all the hero had to do now was to ride his horse or his snorting Jaguar out into the setting sun. Only one thing was lacking. The hero hadn't slain the dragon.

"*Señor*," the captain said suddenly. "I wish to talk. May I?"

"Sure," Allen answered in English. "Talk your goddam head off."

He didn't care if the captain did understand. The slim, handsome, whitewashing captain had that much coming.

The captain understood well enough. A red flush came up from the collar of his uniform and his face was a mask again, a red mask this time. He stared at Allen and the hurt in his eyes showed. He walked over to the window.

"You didn't have to do that, *señor*," he said then, speaking softly.

Allen waited.

“Out there,” the captain said, “there is a mountain of stone. It is named Saddle Mountain because it looks like a saddle.” He raised a hand and pointed.

“And behind that mountain is a lake. Lake McCoy, named after you. Isn’t that a good enough picture to take away from Monterrey? Isn’t that enough to make you forget the other things?”

Allen felt the excitement rise in him then; this was what the captain had really come for. But he was taking his time, and Allen too had to take his time.

“It is not enough,” he answered. “Somebody banged up my pretty gray Jag and I’m mad. The dam was something I did. The killing of Raul and what came after was something somebody did to me.”

“I thought it would not be enough,” the captain sighed.

He turned to go. He didn’t offer to shake hands, he just walked to the door of the room and put his hand on the doorknob.

“Then go see the man you have named Voice,” he said in a matter-of-fact tone. “I have given orders that you are to be allowed to see him.”

“What the hell for?” Allen burst out, disappointed. Was this all the big buildup had led to?

“Who knows?” the captain sighed. “Talk to the man. But this time use that hard head of yours instead of your fists. Use that redheaded brain case, the one that built our Saddle Mountain dam.”

He had gone then. He had built up the tension until it had been almost more than Allen could stand and then he had advised another talkfest, another run around with words.

And yet the captain had urged him to go. He had acted as though his suggestion was a payoff for the dam Allen had given his people. The captain had even arranged the interview.

Allen went.

The jail officials let Allen in without question. They even took Voice out of the common crowded cell room and put him into a small one where Allen could talk alone and undisturbed.

Carefully, Allen inspected the room, walking around hunting for microphones, hitting the walls to make sure they were solid thick plaster and didn’t contain some thin spot where a recording mike could be hidden. He could see nothing wrong; this was just a bare cell, with a cot and a drain in

the center of the floor for sanitation and a window opening up on the street and adequately barred. The floor was filthy and covered with the spit and dirt of many prisoners but that too was standard. A clean cell would really have made Allen suspicious.

Voice lolled on the cot, uninterestedly watching Allen. If he was afraid, he didn't show it.

Allen took a deep breath. He didn't know how, to go about using his redheaded brain case, but he had to start somewhere.

"You know the case of Raul Aguilar has been closed?" he asked.

Voice nodded. He was saving his soft slurring speech today; he had his orders.

"They'll give you a light sentence for attempted murder, maybe one year, maybe two. All you have to do is keep saying it was the Blade. Do you know why?"

"It was the Blade," Voice answered. They could cut him up and he would say that. They could beat him or play the Sack Game, and he would say that. In the long run, he figured, his only chance for safety, his only chance for life, lay in saying that and nothing but that.

Allen cudgeled his brains. When a man's life depends on one answer, how do you get him to give another?

"You will be given a year in prison, maybe two because the length of the sentence doesn't matter," he said bluntly, suddenly, as though he had just realized what Captain Garcia had really meant. "The length of the sentence doesn't matter because, one year or two, you will not live that long."

Voice continued to stare at him, but he wasn't interested now.

"You are a fool if you don't see that," Allen said. "Who could let you live, knowing what you know? The one who gave you your orders knows that and now you know it too. Sometime in that one year, maybe two years, you will suddenly cease to live."

This time Voice didn't say it had been the Blade. Instead he stared at Allen as though he weren't seeing him but was looking right through him—looking ahead into the next two years and seeing the long nights when he wouldn't dare sleep, and the long days when his head would be like the pendulum of a clock, moving back and forth so his eyes could search for the hidden man who held a clasp knife ready to throw.

"You see," Allen concluded.

He had said all he could. He moved to the cell door. He would have to let

Voice stew in that picture, live with it until every cell of his body felt it, until his nerves twitched at every sound, until he begged them to bring Allen to him again.

“What protection do you offer?” Voice asked then, blandly, as though he were just curious.

Allen turned slowly from the cell door.

“When you change your story, the case will not be closed. You will become too important to be killed, and I will find the one who gave you your orders and see that a conviction is secured. Then you will be really safe.”

Voice thought it over slowly, realizing the danger of even thinking about what Allen told him. Finally he made up his mind.

“It wasn’t the Blade,” he said. He sounded surprised that he had said even that much.

“You are a known liar,” Allen replied, smoothly, evenly, as though this kind of talk was perfectly normal. “You must convince me that you tell the truth.”

“I will convince you, *señor*. I will make you live it. We sat on the dry river bank, the Blade and Raul and I. The Blade talked to Raul. Raul couldn’t hear what was said because he was unconscious but the Blade talked anyway. Soon, the Blade said, Raul’s profitable Laredo business would be his, and soon Raul’s beautiful and profitable wife would also be his. I asked him how he was so sure. He told me it was all arranged. First Raul would be killed. Then he would take care of José and that would leave him with Juanita. He said she had been promised to him.”

“By whom?” Allen asked then.

“By the one who sat in the blue car. It was parked off the road about two hundred yards away from us and the one in that car arranged it.”

“Who?” Allen demanded again, his voice rising abruptly.

“That I don’t know. I asked the Blade but he shrugged and said it was the clever one. He bragged how clever that one was. He said I would see Raul die and then suddenly Raul wouldn’t be dead, just missing. He said I should wait until I see who kills Raul.”

“You were waiting for me to come by?” Allen gasped. “The plans called for me? My car?”

“For you, for the two low bright lights, close together speeding along the bank. I said what if he doesn’t come, what if he doesn’t speed, but the Blade laughed and said I should watch for the signal. The big blue car signalled us



with its brake lights. That was you passing. You couldn't see that, just one flick on the brakes and the lights blinked. We pushed Raul and the Blade ran. The blue car picked him up. I waited for you."

"Who?" Allen demanded savagely. "What you told me I already knew. Which one?"

"I don't know," Voice admitted. He really got it then; he realized the implications of what he had said. "Don't leave me," he screamed. "You promised me protection. Don't leave me to them now."

Allen forced himself to be calm, to ignore the disappointment he felt while he smoked a cigarette and thought.

"Who told you to say it was the Blade?" he asked finally. It would have to be the same one who had waited in the blue car.

"A man I never saw before. He came with the message to the prison. He had been arrested as a drunk and he spent the night in the big cell. During the night, he told me. They let him out in the morning."

Voice came off the cot and slipped on the filthy floor. He got up again and came close to Allen, grabbing for him, trying to keep him from leaving the cell. Allen was suddenly aware of the sour, foul smell of the man and he shook him off and pushed him away. He had to fight not to be sick. Voice clawed toward Allen again. At that instant, as though someone had been waiting, the shots roared out, filling the room.

Allen dove away from Voice. Right into the filthy mess on the stinking floor, he rolled and then scrambled and slid along the floor until he had reached the cot against the wall and burrowed his way under it. He turned the cot over, hiding behind it, knowing it was no protection, no shield. He held it in front of him while the shots rang out and he wondered how they could keep missing him, huddled behind the strip of canvas, but no bullet cut into the cloth.

Voice screamed and then screamed again, each scream telling of another bullet in his flesh. The sound of his voice was cut off suddenly, turned into a gurgle and then into silence. Still, the bullets kept thudding into him until the magazine was emptied, and even then the sounds of the firing kept echoing and ricocheting in the cell. From outside came the shouting of people and the noise of a motor rising to a full roar and then dying away.

Allen wondered if it had been a big blue Cadillac.

The jailers came running then, too late, as always, and now Allen could see what he looked like and he could smell himself. He was sick in the

middle of that messy floor and they thought it was because of what Voice looked like with half his head shot away, but it wasn't that. It was something more than that. Every time someone died, Allen was right in the middle of it. Emily was supposed to be the fatal woman; he was worse than she was.

They helped him from the cell and he stripped and showered and was sick again under the shower. He waited until the hotel sent a change of clothes to him. Then he walked out into the fresh, soft air of Monterrey and now he couldn't get out of the town fast enough.

## CHAPTER 14

HE PACKED and loaded the Jag. Then he hung around the hotel bar until the morphine would have time to wear off Juanita. A couple of times he tried to get Tony at the club, but Tony wasn't there; he was out fighting his hopeless fight, while Allen sat idly at a hotel bar, sipping beer and watching the girls go by.

Late that afternoon he called the hospital again. Juanita had come out of the dope all right, she had come out and left the hospital. A hotel in Mexico City was all the forwarding address she had left. That did it for Allen. He paid his bill, shook hands all around, tried to call Tony once more and then drove out of Monterrey.

The big Jag climbed the surrounding hills swiftly and broke out on top. Behind him now was Saddle Mountain with the streams and brooks that were forming McCoy Lake. It was a hell of a feeling, looking at something that was making you immortal, seeing it happen right before your eyes.

A sudden chilling shock went through Allen as he watched. He felt as though one of the mountain streams had broken out of its channel and punched into the car. He started the car and roared away from the spot. He had forgotten all about the children while he had been admiring himself. While he had been trying to trap Voice, while he had sat on the mountain top, he had forgotten all about the two children.

It was rough going on the crazy road. Deep holes in the pavement, each one able to tear the wheel off a speeding car, lay invisible until the last second. The road twisted and turned like a dying snake and as he fought the steering wheel around the hairpin turns, his wheels spun dirt and sand over the edges of the steep cliffs.

He sped through the town of Montemorelos and hoped no cop would try to stop him. The few people in his way scattered, cursing, but he kept going. Now he began to use his spotlight, searching the side of the road for the small arrow marker that would point out the village. And while he watched for the road marker, he had to fight the Jag's wheel just to remain on that killer highway.

He saw the small wooden arrow finally and he shot past it with his brakes burning and tires squealing. He backed up and then shot the car into the narrow lane. In front of him he could see the little lights from the charcoal

fires in the village. It seemed quiet and peaceful, but he knew the sound of his motor would alert them all.

He pulled in at the bar that served that whole village; bars were the information booths of Mexico. The men inside had come out to see what the noise was all about and these men weren't city people; these were village people, half-Indian, half-everything else on earth, and outside of each other, they distrusted the whole world. They formed a line on the dirt lane outside the bar and they watched him and none of them moved.

"There are two newly orphaned children in this village," he said swiftly, hoping he could get through their suspicious minds. "Their grandmother cares for them. I must talk to her."

"The woman you ask for is famous," an old man answered. "The police asked for her today and visitors from Monterrey came and talked to her."

Allen could bet when that had happened. While he had been with Voice and right after he had been with Voice, these visitors had come.

"Where is she?" he urged them.

The old man pointed into the darkness. They didn't even have electricity in the village.

"You could never find her," he warned. "My son Benito will lead you."

Come on, Benny, prayed Allen while the old man gravely gave directions to his young son. The boy leaped into the seat next to Allen, overjoyed at the chance of riding the foreign sports car. Allen hoped the kid's fun wouldn't include taking him on a joy ride over the countryside, but the kid pointed down the street and they took off, spurring dust back at the men near the bar.

Benito loved the way the Jag cut ninety-degree turns. He waited until the last split second before directing Allen into another lane. And soon they were pulling up before a dark, thatched hut that stood alone a couple of hundred yards from the street.

Allen cut the motor and ran inside while Benny waited for him.

The little house was quiet and dark. Allen listened but couldn't hear a thing and the fear in him had become almost a living certainty. He ran back to the car and played the spot on the thatched hut and took a big flash out of the glove compartment. Then he went back to the hut.

He didn't see the old woman until the light hit her eyes, but then she jumped up screaming and she sat on the ground where she'd been lying and she continued to scream and rock herself, hugging herself with fear as she rocked.

Allen started to reason with her but she wouldn't listen. She continued to scream in a high-pitched, frightening wail, and then Allen's arms were pinned from behind and somebody jumped on him and then bodies poured over him from all directions and he was overpowered and thrown to the ground. He fought back for a while and then someone picked up his flash and hit him with it and after that he lay still.

They tied him with leather thongs and carried him back to his car and tied the thongs to the front wheel and then, for the first time, they felt safe. They stepped back, forming a half-circle around him, the men in front smoking, the women behind, peeking around the shoulders of their men. His spotlight, still fixed on the small hut, was the only light in the area.

The first thing Allen felt was the leather cutting into his arms, and when he tried to rise, he felt the thongs that tied him to his wheel. He looked up at the men who had tied him.

"The children," he said sharply, trying to stun them, to frighten them and make them listen. "The children. Are they safe?"

"He must be the one," the old woman wailed, coming close to him. She spat. "We were warned he would come and he came. He is the one."

Until now, Allen had been sick with fear for the two kids. Now for the first time his own fear flicked inwards towards him. He could feel the hate and confusion of the people around him. The unearthly wail of the grandmother was being taken up by the other women, egging the men on to destroy him and burn him and smash his evil machinations. In a few minutes, these peaceful, suspicious ranch workers would become ancient, primitive Indians again. When that happened, nothing would save him.

"Look, men," he said in pure loud Spanish, "these are women talking. They are hysterical. Everyone knows that a woman is a hysterical, stupid thing."

Someone laughed at that old Mexican joke. He hated saying it, but anything else he might say would sound too foreign for them to believe; all they wanted to hear was what they had been hearing all their lives.

"If you harm me, you will be sorry in the morning," he went on. "And no one will regret it more than I will."

He got a couple of more laughs with that one. They figured he must be an old hand in Mexico to know all the barroom wheezes. They thought he was an old comedian, a regular Cantinflas. He didn't feel funny with the sweat of fear running down his clothes, with his mind following a car in which two

screaming, twisting kids were trapped.

Somebody shoved the wailing old woman out of the way so they could better hear this comedian. But he was through joking with them.

“While I’m trussed up here like a chicken, somebody evil has the two children,” he reminded them.

“The children are safe with that one,” an old man argued. “We all decided that less than an hour ago.”

Something about the way the old man twisted his words clicked with Allen.

“The woman,” he gasped at them. “The woman with the bandages on her face.”

“He knows about her,” the grandmother screamed again and Allen realized he had almost signed his own death warrant with that crack. Juanita must have convinced them of the great danger the children were in and she must have also convinced them that someone would make an effort to come after her. It was like a game of tag and he was “it,” trapped in a village with no electricity and no telephone and no police except for a wandering trio of soldiers who themselves were just like the villagers.

“I’m not the one she warned you against,” he argued. “It was another one.”

“That car in the road I warned you about,” someone said suddenly, remembering, and the men around Allen became silent. They were struggling with all the things that were happening to them, trying to understand them.

“The car Manuel got into,” the same man continued.

“A big blue Cadillac,” Allen told them, certain now that he had come too late.

“A small, black Ford,” the man answered, suspicious again.

“The car doesn’t matter,” Allen said desperately. “Who was in that car?”

“I couldn’t see,” the man said apologetically. “It was dark on the road and the car lights were bright, but Manuel walked around the front of the car and got into it.”

“How many were there?” Allen pleaded.

“That, too, I couldn’t see, but I told them when I came back and I was afraid, but they all laughed at me.”

He was glad Allen was vindicating him.

“That car,” Allen said. “It went down the road in the same direction Juanita and the two children had taken?”

“The same direction.”

Allen groaned then and stopped fighting and the men around him looked ashamed. Just a bunch of kids grown up and playing house. They had been so worried about that second car chasing Juanita, they had been so sure they had messed up the kids’ chances, that when the first foreigner fell into their hands, they wanted to kill him as though that would protect the kids and make up for their own failure.

Quickly, now, they bent and untied him as though he could still save them. He had them so confused that if he had killed the old woman now, they still wouldn’t touch him; they might even think it a good thing.

He didn’t wait for the circulation to come back to his hands. He spun the Jag away from them, adding up the minutes, converting them into miles, testing the speed of an old Ford on the twisting road and figuring how long it would take him to catch up if Juanita was still ahead of her pursuer. He refused even to think about the possibility that Juanita herself might be a threat to the children; if she were, there was nothing he could do about it, he was far too late.

A Ford could cover about forty or fifty miles an hour on this road, he figured as he raced down the lane and turned back to the highway. His Jag might do sixty-five or seventy with luck. In addition, the Ford driver had to watch for Juanita’s car because she might pull off the road and hide at any point, especially if she saw the Ford’s headlights catching up with her in her mirror. She would see the Ford’s headlights long before the Ford driver could see her taillights. His engineer’s mind went on methodically, clicking facts and figures, adding them up and narrowing the area he had to search.

Juanita could drive almost as fast as the Ford driver. Bandages, pain and all, her fear would make her drive her car faster than she had ever gone before. That meant that the Ford could gain at most, about ten miles an hour. With an hour’s start it would be five hours before the Ford could catch her, five hours and two hundred or two hundred fifty miles ahead.

Unless she wasn’t afraid, he thought suddenly, getting cold with panic. Unless she never intended to go that far.

He pushed that thought from him. She had to be afraid.

And then the thought hit him that the Jag would be out of gas long before he could overtake them.

He raced down the highway swinging his big spot from side to side. At the first open gasoline station he filled the tank and bought two extra cans of

gasoline. They told him that Juanita had stopped for gas but they hadn't seen the Ford. Juanita had pulled out less than half an hour ago; he had gained that much on them. He took up the race again.

He was out in the open on a wild, desolate stretch of country when he saw the car near the side of the road. It was half a mile away when he first saw it, and as he came closer, two uniformed figures ran out into the road, waving him down. That damned gas station attendant, Allen thought, as he bent low over the wheel and rode right through them. They scattered just in time and the shots from their guns sounded like weak faint pops.

Now he had the cops after him and there would be a roadblock somewhere ahead.

Soon he would drop to the desert floor and then he would catch the Ford as though it were standing still. He began to watch for two sets of taillights as the road began the twisting dangerous drop from the mountains.

Instead of the taillights, he ran into the roadblock.

He saw the big black and white Buick blocking the road and he knew the two cops would be barricaded behind it. He looked for a place to go around the Buick but there wasn't any. The cops had picked their spot on a sheer hairpin turn where the road ran narrow and where the sides dropped away, hardly leaving any shoulders. Even the Jag couldn't claw its way around the police car. He had to slow down.

He rolled almost up to it, his lights still blazing, his spot trained on the Buick blinding the cops if they should try to look. But they didn't have to look, all they had to do was wait. They knew he couldn't get around them and Allen knew their automatics were in their hands, ready.

When he was almost touching the police car, he nosed the Jag off the road. His pulse hammered and his breath came in forced, short gulps. First the front wheel clawed the air and then the rear wheel followed and the Jag skidded sickeningly and keeled over. He forced himself to wait while the seat beneath him rose in the air and slowly began to turn over, almost dumping him out of the car. When the car body scraped the road, he gunned the motor for the last time. Dirt spun around him, the car twisted and reached out over the rim of the sheer drop, and then Allen jumped over the low door and threw himself flat beneath the rim of the road. The car turned turtle, almost sweeping him with it as it began the grinding, bumping, smashing trip down the mountainside.

For a while the lights of the Jag showed where it rolled and twisted,



dragging gravel with it, threatening to undermine the road, but Allen wasn't watching. He knew the cops were. He crawled along the rim of the road and then crept back onto the highway again and inched forward until he was flat against the police car. The few sounds he made were lost in the explosion of the Jag as it ripped apart on the rocks.

After a while it was silent and Allen could hear the breathing of the two cops as they stood on the edge of the road staring down at the black mountainside.

"He is dead," one of them said. "He must be dead."

"That is clear," the other one answered.

"Must we go look?" the first one asked, holding back. "He will keep until we can call a wrecker."

"We must go look," the second cop said. "There is money in his pocket and watches and many valuable things. If anyone came and took them, we would be accused of stealing them. And, perhaps, he still lives."

They turned off their car lights and Allen suddenly tightened and turned from the car. If they took their car keys with them, he wouldn't have a chance. One of them got into the car, started the motor and then inched over until the spotlight shone down into the black mass of junk below. Then they both began to slide and slip down the incline, following the path the Jag had swept out for them.

He let them go. He waited, forcing himself to take his time. Not until they had reached the Jag, not until one of them yelled, "He isn't here," did he move. Then he got in quietly and drove the car away. He knew what would happen to him when they called police highway headquarters. At the next roadblock, they wouldn't even give him a chance to surrender.

The police car was full of gas, and sitting snugly in its leather case was the powerful police rifle. Allen took it out and laid it on the seat beside him.

The Buick felt like a twenty-ton truck after the Jaguar, and he had to slow down until he rolled out onto the flat desert floor. Then he pushed the big car to its limit and fumbled until he found the red spot switch and flicked it. He played the light from side to side, searching. Those two cars ahead had the whole world to hide in now. The Mexican desert was big and furrowed and shadowy. Anyone could hide a car there.

Time ran out like a mathematical equation. He passed the point of time when he should have caught the Ford, even with the new slower speed of the Buick. By now, either he should have caught the Ford or the Ford should

have overtaken Juanita. In that case, he should have passed them both.

He began to sweat again.

The red spot swung from side to side and he kept watching the car clock. Soon he would have to turn back and he didn't know how to do that. The cops would be gunning for him, Juanita and the kids would be dead, there would be no world left for him to turn back to.

Then he saw them and he wasn't prepared. First he saw their shadows as he came close and then as he flashed past, he saw the cars themselves, the big blue Cadillac parked at the side of the road and a small black Ford parked about fifty feet in front of the Caddie.

Allen made no attempt to stop. Not with the two cars together, not with Juanita and the kids caught by the driver of the Ford. He drove on at top speed, still flashing his spot, trying to make them believe that he had missed them. They wouldn't know who drove that police car, they might not be alarmed by a police car, and they might just believe that it wasn't looking for them at all.

It was a big desert and the road ran straight. He had to kill time until the road finally dipped and it was safe to turn his lights off and make a U-turn on the desert and start back again, going more slowly now so that the sound of the motor shouldn't reach them. And then he had to kill more time when he shut the motor and let the car coast as far as it would before he dropped off with the rifle and crossed the road and began to sneak back to the parked cars. He tried not to think of the time but his engineer's mind wouldn't let him forget how many seconds a body lives after it has been shot, how quickly a strangled child can die.

It was still telling him, still egging him on when he reached the cars. The Ford was empty and he crept on to the Cadillac. Its doors were open to the desert but Allen could make out a shadow behind the wheel. He continued the wide detour in the desert, stepping carefully, until he finally was abreast of the open front door. He kept his body low and slowly eased the rifle over the floor of the car and up on to the seat until the muzzle pointed at the driver.

"Don't move," he warned, hardly breathing the words.

The body stiffened but didn't move. Allen raised himself cautiously and got into the back seat. He couldn't see who the figure was, but he could see the two kids on the back seat, their arms around each other, quiet with the fear they were familiar with now, but holding on to each other as though they

were the only safety they knew.

He searched the driver for weapons. There weren't any.

"Manuel," he breathed.

"That is what I am called," Manuel answered. "I do not like this business. I promised to guard the children, but I do not like the rest of it."

Goddam village halfwit, thought Allen; he had been convinced he was protecting the children.

Christ, Allen thought then, what if it turned out that he really had been protecting them.

"Where is Juanita?" he asked the kids.

"She ran away and made us swear to lie in the seat and not move, but this man came and found us anyway."

This man. They didn't know Manuel then.

Allen stared out into the desert. It seemed to stare back at him, shadowy and quiet and any one of the shadows could be a Juanita frozen in fear of her hunter stalking her.

He could go out there and look for her but he didn't dare. As soon as he would leave, anyone could start the car and drive away—Manuel, the hunter, or Juanita. He had to sit and wait until he found out where they were in that shadowy dead world.

He found out.

Her scream cut the night apart, blasting the silence, shooting its pain through his body until he could feel the hurt himself. Someone must have slammed into her broken cheekbone to make her scream like that.

He stared out in the direction of her scream and the halfwit fidgeted uneasily.

"Don't move," Allen warned.

"I won't, *señor*."

There was another scream, nearer this time. The kids whimpered and Allen had to sit there and take it, not daring to move away from the car.

He had to make up his mind. He could kill this halfwit, or knock him unconscious and then chase Juanita, or else he could have the choice of sitting there and listening to her scream, letting her pain tell him where she was. It was no choice for him; and either way, he could lose all the marbles.

The scream came again, much nearer this time, and two figures came into view, shadowy and dim with just a faint blur to tell him which one was the bandaged Juanita.

“Run, children, run,” she screamed.

The kids began to scramble out of the car, but Allen soothed them. They remembered him from the Villa de Guadalupe and they snuggled against him, unable to get close enough in their fear. He had to hold them off to give himself gun room.

He wondered why Juanita was still alive, why it was necessary to bring her back to the car at all.

“It was promised that she would not be hurt,” the halfwit protested, whimpering, and Allen knew why Juanita still lived. If only one figure appeared out of the desert, the halfwit would take the kids and run and he would be harder to find in that dead world than she had been. He knew its moods and shadows. And if he were found, he could fight.

“Manuel,” Allen whispered, “I may have to kill the *gringo*. You understand that.”

“I understand,” Manuel replied.

“Manuel,” a voice suddenly called from the desert; the quietness in the car had raised suspicion.

“Do not answer,” Allen warned. Manuel was quiet.

The figure knew something was wrong. Allen saw the arm come up, ready to club Juanita down. Allen had been waiting for this. He didn’t even think about the possibility of missing, not with that rifle resting securely on the back seat of the big, steady Caddie. He squeezed the trigger gently, regretfully, and the figure fell and Juanita broke away and ran. Allen had hoped that Tony would make a break for the Ford so that he would not have had to kill him, but Tony hadn’t given him time for a fancy shot.

“I had to do it, Manuel,” he explained, while the children screamed.

“I know,” the halfwit answered, reaching back to pet the children. “Now they will be safe just like he promised me they would be.”

Juanita stumbled over the edge of the road, recovered herself and reached the back seat. She almost tripped on Allen and as he reached out to steady her she recoiled before this new threat. Then she recognized him.

“Mickey,” she sobbed. She slumped against him. The sudden pain made her scream again.

He drove the Cadillac swiftly to the police car and took out the first-aid kit. He shot the needle expertly into her thigh and then anxiously counted the seconds until the dope should take. Behind him, Manuel babbled confusedly to the kids, trying to explain that the *gringo* was not stabbing the lady but was

helping her. They wouldn't believe him; they had seen a lady stabbed before and they knew that stabbing never helped anyone. Juanita had to turn and quiet them and assure them that she was all right and that the *gringo* was really her friend. Everyone in the car finally quieted down.

"Now you'll have to take me to Guadalajara," she said sleepily at last when the drug began to take hold.

"You stupid nitwit," he burst out at her. "You didn't take the Shadow with you because you didn't want anyone in Monterrey to know you were leaving. But you had to call Tony up to tell him and borrow his car. Tony, of all people."

"But, Allen," she protested, rousing herself at his outburst. "I couldn't suspect Tony. He was your friend. He was the only American friend you had."

Allen was an American and she loved Allen. Tony was an American, therefore she could trust Tony. Simple. And besides, he had never warned her about Tony.

He drove the big blue car slowly, trying to lull her, trying to keep her from being jostled. Back on the road, Tony was lying dead and Allen didn't know if the desert animals would get to him before the cops would. Maybe the ants, maybe the vultures, maybe some bigger ground animal. It didn't seem to matter now.

It was like an old Bible story, he thought, as he drove with one arm around Juanita. The Jaguar had killed a man; now the Jaguar was dead. The Blade had pushed the man and now the Blade was dead. Voice had helped push Raul and Voice, too, was dead. And Tony had ordered that pushing and now Tony was dead.

"Allen," whispered Juanita. He turned to her, concerned. He had thought she was asleep.

"How did you know it was Tony? I didn't know until his Ford cut me off."

"Go to sleep, you foolish one," he said softly in Spanish. "Who else would offer you to the Blade? Only he and Emily. Who else had to kill the children because he had gotten their mother to pose as a widow? Garcia could have had them killed while the police still held them."

"Why not Emily?" she asked, jealous of Emily all at once, remembering all the nights he had spent alone with the beautiful blonde. "How did you know it was Tony?"

“Because beautiful American women don’t kill,” he said joking, teasing her, waiting for her to fall asleep. Emily hadn’t sat on a river bank in this same Cadillac, waiting for Allen to smash into Raul’s body. Emily had been where the fat little fingers of Garcia could reach her.

He shivered when he thought of Tony’s body back on the desert floor. The first animal to reach him must be nosing closer now, whining eagerly at the smell of the fresh blood.

The Caddie hummed down the highway to the City of Mante, and at last, Juanita slept.

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